THE

GOLD-WORSHIPPERS:

OR,

THE DAYS WE LIVE IN.

VOL. I.

Immediately to succeed "THE GOLD-WORSHIPPERS."

BOTHWELL:

OR,

THE DAYS OF QUEEN MARY.

An Historical Romance,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

JAMES GRANT, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF "THE SCOTTISH CAVALIERS," ETC. ETC.

LONDON: PARRY & CO., 32 & 33, LEADENHALL STREET.

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apere et corrumpi, Sæculum vocatur.'
TACITUS.

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THE

GOLD-WORSHIPPERS.

CHAPTER I.

In one of the most fashionable streets of Belgravia, which we do not intend more distinctly to particularize, in a year of Our Lord so very recent that no chronologer, anxious to ascertain the precise date, needs search farther back than the last six or seven years, resided the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton. This lady was the widow of a man old enough to have been her father, or even grandfather, had he lived in an age less Malthusian. Colonel Sparkleton was himself the widower of two wives before he

conferred upon his third bride the honours of a state which may be truly designated that of *double-blessedness*, as it unites the advantages of being single with the comforts and independence of the married condition. But having had the misfortune to be born that nondescript thing, a younger son of a great family, the Colonel found himself compelled to marry twice for money before he could conscientiously think of entering the holy state once for love. But he did it at last, in style, when, having reached the ripe manhood of sixty-three, he married the Honourable Geraldine Margaret Annabella, fifth and youngest daughter of the Right Honourable Baron St. Alwyn, a girl about sixteen years old, who having little or no fortune, and a great deal of beauty, certainly gave some reason for the universal opinion of the fashionable world at the time, which pronounced that Colonel Sparkleton's marriage with Miss St. Alwyn was decidedly a love-match. He might have had his pick of the whole lot of the St. Alwyn daughters,

the eldest of whom was a good deal nearer his own age, and was, therefore, a much more suitable alliance. At least, she considered so herself; and never forgave her younger sister for her unhandsome behaviour in carrying off the prize, though she condescended, as far as possible, to partake of the advantages thence accruing.

A love-match, or of some sentiment that goes by that name in good society, the affair undoubtedly was, on one side at least. Nor do we know that we have any right to dispute that it was so with both of the contracting parties, save the ill-natured reflections of a pack of disappointed nephews and nieces, on ascertaining that the Colonel had left the whole of his property to his widow, on his demise. "After the life she had led him!" "But what could one expect from an old fool, without a particle of sense, marrying a girl of her age?" "I am sure, I think, she served him quite right; *only* for him to leave her all his money!" were the sorrowing comments of those near

and affectionate relatives, on learning the facts of the case.

And how had she served him? With the most diligent inquiries, in the most scandalous quarters, we have not been able to fix upon her any more serious charge than that of a general system of flirtation and coquetry which any fashionable married woman might permit herself, without the slightest attaint to her character. Men unanimously pronounced her a "charming woman—a most delightful creature;" and declared Colonel Sparkleton "the most enviable old fellow in existence." As to women, they have always something malicious to say against those of their own sex who are much admired by the opposite one. But as Mrs. Sparkleton's society, both before and after the demise of the "enviable old fellow," was eagerly sought and cultivated by ladies who were themselves models of correctness, and who, in private, most severely judged her conduct and demeanour, we cannot think there was any real founda-

tion for the reports which, from time to time, were vaguely raised, to balance the almost irresistible effect of Mrs. Sparkleton's gaiety, wit, beauty, and—audacity.

Perhaps, after all, the Colonel thought it more amusing to be tormented to death by a fascinating young wife, than by the consanguineous relatives who, in general, undertake that task for elderly gentlemen having money to leave. One undeniable fact appears on the record. He left all that he possessed in the world—houses, in town and country, an estate, a valuable stud of horses, his pointers and his portrait—to his beloved wife, the honourable Geraldine Margaret Annabella, in addition to the very handsome jointure he had settled on her at their marriage. At twenty-four, the proprietress of those Christian designations found herself rich, young, and independent of all control, or, as she expressed it, "left alone in the world, with nobody but herself to look to for advice and protection." In truth, her right honourable father and

mother were both gone, if one might believe the tablets over the family pew, to await a joyful resurrection from the vaults below the church, whence, meanwhile, according to more matter-of-fact chemists, they were exhaling in the form of noxious gases, to corrupt the air for survivors. Gone, however, they were, and Mrs. Sparkleton was fully determined that she would submit herself in future to the control of no one who did not possess some better right to exercise it than a pompous and dogmatic nobleman of a brother, and four sneering, old-maidish sisters.

Not that she thought of a husband, in the reservation. Mrs. Sparkleton imagined, or, at all events, declared, that she had had quite enough of husbands. And, moreover, "she adored the memory" of her defunct spouse. She "hated to be chained," and was "quite satisfied to remain as she was." In fact, she had been two or three years a widow at the time our history begins; and, great as her loss was, we are happy to be

able to record, she had so far got over it, that not the slightest vestige remained in her costume of all the woful appendages with which women lament their departed lords. At the moment we commence, Mrs. Sparkleton was seated in a little boudoir, overlooking some gardens, which was furnished with the magnificence and elegance of a fairy drawing-room; attired in the liveliest and lightest possible morning costume, of white muslin flowered with the most delicate apple-blossoms, with a tiny lace cap on her head, that seemed accidentally dropped by some sylph just on the crown, and rose-satin slippers half buried in a richly embroidered ottoman, which they had the honour of sharing with a snow-white lap-dog, not much larger than the one mentioned by historians—fabulists we mean—as being able to pass with facility through a ring.

This boudoir had been contrived and embellished, with the profusion of elderly passion, by the late Colonel. He had ex-

hausted on it all the taste and elegance, and spent no trifle of the cash he had acquired in his painful apprenticeship to his two first wives: one an exacting heiress, the other a still more exacting widow, with a large jointure. He had even matched the hangings to his last young bride's complexion. She was a brunette, and, consequently, the walls were of yellow satin, puckered and gilded into splendid centre-pieces, so that they resembled suns in full blaze—in the opinion of many people and intention of the upholsterer; but, according to the report of the eldest Miss St. Alwyn, in reality only "great ugly sunflowers." Every little ingenious toy and decoration that riches and luxury could procure or demand, filled the apartment—in fact, stowed it, so that it was dangerous for any one not perfectly familiar with the geography to move in it, for fear of knocking over some invaluable little treasure of art or virtû.

Supreme among all these the Colonel had

doubtless considered his own portrait—which was, in fact, a very fine Carrick miniature, displaying the artist's forte of characteristic resemblance to his originals in perfection. This he had placed in the most conspicuous place in the room, over the mantelpiece, immediately above a superb bronze column of Vendôme, with its little conqueror of the world on the top, looking down with folded arms—not on mankind, but on a beautiful statuette of Taglioni, in one of her most inspired gyrations. The Colonel knew that people always looked at *that*, and he expected, in consequence, that they would always see him, just above it, in his fine regimentals, with his Waterloo medal on his breast, which he had won by the merest accident in the world; for it was neither his own nor his mother's intention that he should see any actual service when he entered the Guards. This portrait was, however, no longer visible. Mrs. Sparkleton could not bear the afflicting reminiscences

excited by its contemplation; or else she was afraid that the colours would fade by constant exposure to the light; so she had procured a very fine rosewood case for it, richly inlaid with silver work, and always kept it locked. In fact, at last she could not open it; for, in playing with the key, her charming little lapdog, Fidéle, had one day forgotten to return it, and as no very diligent inquiries were ever made into his peccadilloes, its fate remained a mystery.

It would be a fruitful subject of philosophic research to inquire why women so frequently call their lapdogs "Fidéle." The word has a pretty sound, but one would think it would often have an air of reproach in their sensorium. We have no time, however, to philosophize; and simply recommending the matter to the attention of metaphysicians, proceed in our narrative by stating the important fact that Mrs. Sparkleton was at breakfast,—at breakfast in her boudoir;—we request the reader to notice this fact, because, as it was an almost

invariable custom of the lady to breakfast in bed, it is natural to suppose that she had some especial reason for being out of it on this occasion. Not to keep the reader too long in conjecture—she had a guest, to whom, for some reason or another, she thought such a mark of complaisance was due.

It would have been difficult, nevertheless, to discover any good personal reason in the visiter's self to account for this distinction. A little old woman, in rusty old mourning, and in a widow's cap, not half so prim, drawn-up, and starched, as herself and her demeanour, sate opposite to Mrs. Sparkleton at breakfast. A table of beautiful or-molu, on which was a tray covered with materials for the meal, served in the finest china, and artistically wrought silver, separated the parties. Physically and morally, it would scarcely have been possible to oppose two stronger contrasts, thus brought into juxtaposition by the influence of a power mightier than nature and destiny combined. Hav-

ing only three thousand a year, and being besides of a speculative turn, Mrs. Sparkleton was of course in debt; and the little old woman was one of those extraordinary productions of the universal and insatiable love of gold which distinguishes modern times—a female usurer.

Mrs. Skinflintz was the widow of a man of the purest Caucasian breed, though she herself always professed to be a Christian, and perhaps with as good reason as many whose more punctual attendance at church gives them the right to call themselves so. Her late respected partner had raised himself, by his own merits and industry, to the honourable position he occupied at his death—that of bill-discounter and money-lender to a numerous private connexion among the younger nobility and gentry, at the moderate rate of seventy-five and a half per cent., with the usual bonuses, and on good security. He began life as a slopseller in Houndsditch, and ended it as a first-rate west end pawnbroker, an honoured name on 'Change, a

familiar of the high and mighty, the proudest of whom addressed him as their "dear Skinflintz!" leaving his widow and family some seventy thousand pounds to divide among them, and the light of his example to guide them through the glittering earthmines of Mammon. Attached by habit and an unabated thirst for increase, his widow accordingly still "carried on the business," — as the American sausage-maker's spouse caused to be engraven on her husband's headstone.

As we have said, it was scarcely possible to find a stronger contrast than these two breakfasters presented. The fine Grecian nose and aristocratic profile of Mrs. Sparkleton, with its Chalons-like colouring and delicacy of outline and hues, was in forcible opposition to the little turned-up olfactory of Mrs. Skinflintz, and the dirty tincture of her skin, which still retained the tints of a Houndsditch atmosphere. The elegant stature and contour of the lady were as little in keeping with the short, bent, and

narrow-chested figure of her guest—who was so, because Mrs. Sparkleton did not choose she should be known as her money-lender. Perhaps for an additional reason, the lady having discovered one human weakness in the composition of the Female Usurer, which was, a great desire to pass for an intimate and personal friend with people of rank. It was particularly necessary on this occasion to cajole Mrs. Skinflintz; whence the unusual honour of an invitation to the only meal which Mrs. Sparkleton thought she could have the patience to partake with her. The lady's natural haughtiness and inconsiderateness of character were, however, subjected to a severe trial in the effort, as will appear from a brief outline of the conversation between them.

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, but, dear Mrs. Skinflintz, why don't you leave off mourning, now? I am sure, old Skinflintz—I mean, poor Mr. Skinflintz—has been dead quite long enough, hasn't he?" Mrs. Sparkleton was saying, with an air of affectionate interest and reminiscence, as if striving to recollect how long the lamented departed had been gone.

"Tastes differs—I don't think so, that's all, mum," replied the usuress, snappishly. "Fine ladies has different opinions, of course, from ours—but I must say, I don't think three years such an immense time to wear mourning for one's poor dear husband, when he's gone, never more to return!"

Perhaps Mrs. Sparkleton thought in her own mind that the indefinite prolongation of such an absence was one of its consolations. But she was too well-bred to say anything that she really thought.

"Ah,—when people are so much attached as you and Mr. Skinflintz were . . . I believe?" she replied, with some little involuntary doubt quivering on the last word.

"We was as happy a couple as ever lived!" said Mrs. Skinflintz, setting down her coffee-cup with a fervour of emotion that nearly cracked the saucer.

"Perhaps!" thought the widow of Colonel Sparkleton; adding aloud, "I only mentioned it because I really don't think the dress becomes you, nor any one! It is the ugliest thing that ever was invented, that horrid widow's cap, and I believe the men contrived it among themselves, out of jealousy, in order that it might be quite impossible for us to get married the—no, I do not quite mean that! Of course, nobody would think of getting married again the first year or two."

"I believe some people do, though, all the same," replied Mrs. Skinflintz, sardonically. "But, as I never intend,—for my poor children's sake, left fatherless in a wicked world,—ever to think of anybody never no more, I may just as well wear my mourning out as not; for, since her dear parent was taken away Rebecca's grown so headstrong, she won't wear my things made up again—as she used—and washing comes so expensive when there's a large family, even though people *does* wash at home—you must find that yourself, mum?"

"Oh, Florine attends to all that—my mind is so much harassed with business of all sorts, you know, Mrs. Skinflintz, since the colonel died, that I have no time to look after anything in-doors," replied Mrs. Sparkleton. "But you really seem as if you had breakfasted before you came—you take nothing."

"So I did; we always breakfast at seven, at home. I allow no lazy people in my house," said Mrs. Skinflintz, firmly.

"Why, then, it must be almost lunch time with you? Let me ring for something more substantial than these breakfast bagatelles," replied Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Breakfast whats?" said Mrs. Skinflintz, glancing curiously over the table to discover the viands thus designated.

"I mean, you will take lunch while I finish my breakfast; for, I am almost ashamed to say it, I was not up so early as usual to-day—at the Opera late last night. You will take a little cold tongue and fowl, and a glass of sherry?"

"Not before business — I never eat hearty before business; and poor Mr. Skinflintz never would touch a drop of anything while he was making an arrangement with a party," replied Mrs. Skinflintz, who cherished an idolatrous admiration for the memory of her husband, in all money-making matters.

"Let us to business, then, my dear woman," said Mrs. Sparkleton, with an eagerness which, as a borrower now of

some standing, she ought to have known better than exhibit. "You can't tell how anxious I am to have the thing concluded! It is a larger sum than usual, I own, this time; but then it will yield thousands per . . . per cent., don't you call it?—and retrieve everything, and set me quite right again, you know; for it is really very harassing to have to be borrowing continually! But then the Colonel lived so up to his income, and I knew so little about business when he left me everything to manage, that it is no wonder . . . . in short, I want six thousand pounds."

"Six thousand pounds!" repeated Mrs. Skinflintz — even her professional tranquillity a little struck from its legs. "Six thousand pounds!"

"I wish, indeed, that you could make it eight or nine, or even ten. I shall never have such an opportunity again, I suppose: and that annoying Madame Millefleurs talks quite impertinently about her horrid bill. But I *must* have the six," said Mrs.

Sparkleton, as if she were echoing some decree of destiny.

"*Must!*—what, mum, the Colonel left no charge on the property, did he?" replied Mrs. Skinflintz, with evident eagerness and alarm in her tones.

"Oh, dear, no,—no charge, none whatever—don't imagine it," replied the borrower, hastening to dispel this unpropitious idea. "You can see the will—any one can see it, you know, for a shilling. I want the money to make a—a—let us see what it is called!—an *investment*."

"You—do—mum?" returned the lender, with an involuntary pause between every word of the interrogation.

"Why not? Every one, you know, is speculating now! It is not like trade—it is nothing low; and one makes such prodigious sums of money, that it is quite amazing!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, — her charming cheeks and eyes glowing and sparkling with a passion which their beauty was scarcely originally bestowed to display.

"A thousand per cent!—Indeed, mum, it would be! I never made so much in all my born days, nor Mr. S. either, and we've had dealings where a fair return might as reasonably be expected as anywhere," said Mrs. Skinflintz, with some vehemence, perhaps indignation, at the bare idea of any one, not in the mystery, making a profit which its most skilful adepts were so rarely indeed enabled to realize, with all their praiseworthy exertions.

"But then there never was such a time as this—such a—" began Mrs. Sparkleton.

"I know there's a great demand for money now, mum,—people will give almost any price for it! But a thousand per shent!—as my poor dear husband used to say, in his way, for I always call it cent. myself, and I believe it's the right pronounciation. A thousand per cent.!"

"Perhaps I may make a mistake. I don't exactly know what it will be—how much per cent.,' as you call it—yes, that's

the proper word—but something quite tremendous," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, calmly.

"Then, I wonder, mum, you can have the conscience—a lady of your property—to think for to take the bread out of the mouths of the widow and the fatherless, and to think of wanting me to lend you money for to lend to somebody else!" said Mrs. Skinflintz, agitated out of her politeness by the only powerful passion of her nature, thus outraged.

"Nonsense, my dear woman! I don't mean to lend to any one! What are you talking about?" returned the lady, tranquilly, and preparing to help herself to a second cup of coffee.

"Then I beg pardon, mum. I thought for certain—why, how is it possible to get such a per centage, unless one—not that lending's a good trade! The risks is so enormous, that I am sure I often resolve to give up business, and retire on an honest competence. But then there's one's children!"

"I never heard of your losing much, Skinflintz; I thought you were remarkably lucky on the contrary," said the borrower, soothingly, and perhaps a little uneasily.

"Well, moderate, mum. I have three wretches in the Bench now, that will never pay me a halfpenny of what they owe—will rot in prison rather! To be sure, two of them was of poor Mr. S.'s making, quite against my advice; but he would take his own way, and so he robbed his children for the sake of three vagabonds who, if they could get out, would think no more of letting me and my children want a meal's victuals than I would of seeing a cat starve. But what on earth *investment* can a lady like you want to make, when you have been obliged to go so far beyond your means, that you cannot pay even your dress-maker's little account?"

"Little account! I wish you saw it! Why, it is twice as long as the yards of songs they sell about the streets," said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Lawk, mum, you must be extravagant in dress!" returned the money-lender.

"One cannot always wear the same thing. But I assure you I am not the least extravagant; only the bill has not been paid since the Colonel died—I have been so hurried ever since. But I know you will make allowance for my position. You must have found what a nuisance it is to have to do and look to everything yourself."

"Well, mum, you are the best judge. But what can you want so much money for—all at once? I have known lots of ladies that wanted money, but scarcely ever one that wanted so much at a time," said Mrs. Skinflintz, in a mollified manner, no doubt affected by the resemblance of her own situation to that of her intending debtor.

"I want to buy railway shares, of course! I wonder you don't guess it. Everyone is buying railway shares, and making such fortunes, one is quite astonished to hear about them!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, with enthusiasm.

"Hum, ha!—Railways?" replied Mrs. Skinflintz, with a pinched smile, that involuntarily screwed itself round her thin, tight lips. "Yes, everybody *is* buying railway shares; and that makes money so dear. Money *is* money now-a-days! Not that I blame people, that have the means, for speculating. But, of course, as a lonely widow, left with a family, and all the etceteras, I must have *good, undeniable* security. And, as to lending six thousand pounds, all at once, people must think I am made of money!"

Mrs. Sparkleton thought her friend looked yellow enough, at all events, to deserve such a reputation; but without alluding to that private opinion she contented herself with declaring that, at the very least, she *must* have six thousand pounds. This she reiterated with a vivacity and resolution to which it appeared that Mrs. Skinflintz found she could not long offer effectual resistance.

"Well, if you *must*, mum, you must, cer-

tainly! I shall have to borrow myself,—but, *on good security*, I will try what I can do! Undeniable security! Poor Mr. S. never had no opinion of railways, especially after he found so many people took to buying in them.' Says he, not many hours before his death, 'Sarah,' says he, 'mind what I tell you!—*never you meddle with rails!* There is too many people, that have nothing to pay with, buying in them, for them to pay people as has!' But, of course, that's nothing to nobody—and things, I own, look uncommon well, just at present—only, as a friend, I should recommend you to be careful what line you buy into."

"Oh, I have nothing to do with that!—Mr. Gullibull, the great Russia merchant, you know, has promised to do everything for me of that sort: I have only to find the money," said Mrs. Sparkleton, her fine lip imperceptibly curling at the cordial title which it pleased her monied 'friend' to confer upon herself.

"Gullibull? a very good name, indeed!

And has he taken to rails?" returned Mrs. Skinflintz, with visibly excited interest. "I wonder what'll become of his business? But that's *his* business! They say he's worth half a million, if he's worth a farthing. But, goodness, Mrs. Sparkleton, mum, how came you to know him?"

"Why, through the Fitzhautons. Lord Fitzhauton married their daughter, you know—or rather, you don't, I suppose," said the lady, with some embarrassment, but which she quickly shook off.

"A grand fortin, I s'pose? Yes, my husband used to know *him*; he spent a good deal of money before he came of age, and my poor husband used always to like to lend a hand to young men in difficulties. He paid all off handsomely when he married, so I s'pose she *was* a great fortin'?"

"A hundred thousand pounds, I have heard! Else, of course, a man of such good family as Lord Fitzhauton would never have married a city mushroom's daughter," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with an expression

which might have seemed to an acute observer not altogether one of satisfaction, or even of the contemptuous feeling indicated by her words. "But what has that to do with the matter? I want six thousand pounds on Longacres, and if you will not lend it, another will."

"You are all right, if you have old Gullibull for an adviser; I don't know a better name going," resumed Mrs. Skinflintz, without noticing in the slightest degree the impatience obvious in her interlocutor's tone. "He knows the Railway King himself, so it must be all right: only let me advise you one thing for your good, mum: whenever Humson sells out, *you* sell out."

"I shall leave all that to Mr. Gullibull: he surely understands everything about matters of that sort," said the lady. "But why don't you say whether you will lend the money or not?"

"On Longacres?—Six thousand pounds!"

"Why, the estate cost the Colonel five-

and-twenty thousand! It must surely be worth six."

"The lawyers, of course, will find that out. My lawyer won't see me wronged; I mean, he must see the deeds, and will, and all that," said the female usurer, with calm deliberativeness of reflection. "But what I was a thinking of, Mrs. Sparkleton, mum, if you'll excuse me, was this: why don't you try and catch young Gullibull? He'll be worth having when his father dies, and no mistake!"

"What nonsense!—what an idea!—*I* marry that counting-house fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton, with a disdainful toss of her elegant head; yet adding, with less asperity, "But it is true, he will be worth having whenever money is the only recommendation a man needs have—and really that time seems coming fast. I'll think your hint over, Mrs. Skinflintz; and you know my chance that way ought to be security enough in itself."

"Well, I don't know, mum; for when I

lent you the fifteen hundred, you as good as hinted you were going to marry that great Lord that was here the day I was; and that made me take the I.O.U. without anything else."

The blush of womanly shame that slightly mantled in Mrs. Sparkleton's complexion attested she had not altogether lost that inconvenient and ridiculous habit incidental to youth and feelings not quite hardened, which renders it impossible completely to hide the sentiments, according to the usages of society. But she rallied with surprising quickness. "Why, do people say he is not still after me? But suppose I am not so agreeable to have him as he may be to have me? I did not say I meant to marry him: I said I might if I chose—or what does he come dangling after me for, everywhere? But I am not bound to marry Lord Deville merely because he is a rich man, and a Viscount! There are many things about him which, I assure you, I don't like. He is a great deal older than I am, and I have had

enough of that; and his character was none of the best in early life. Still, if it would make your mind easier about the security— I really think I hear his rap at the door!— he comes to see me every morning as regularly as the postman—and now, I remember, I *must* have the *seven* thousand. I want *one* for my own use."

"On the same terms as the old fifteen hundred?" said Mrs. Skinflintz, carelessly, and taking a snuff-box from her worn, old bombazeen pocket, she added, deliberately tapping the lid, "Though I don't see well how I can do it—such a large sum!"

"My dear woman! It was only twelve hundred in reality, you know, though I signed for the fifteen. And, upon my word, it is ridiculous to think of such an exorbitant interest as twenty per cent. on such a large sum," remonstrated the borrowing lady of fashion.

"That's the very reason that makes it high. 'The more people want money, the more they ought to give for it,' my poor

husband used to say, and it stands to reason," replied Mrs. Skinflintz, with eloquence. "The risk's greater—and I never did like them railway specs.!"

"But you are to lend on Longacres, not on my strip!" said Mrs. Sparkleton. "I wonder you can try to confuse the transactions! Besides, I heard them all agree at Gullibull's, the other day, that money was uncommonly cheap, and that you could get as much as you wanted at four per cent., or something of that sort. But that really is Lord Deville; so I shall be glad if you will make up your mind whether you will lend it me or not. For if you will not, I shall try people in the city, and get as much as I want, without being obliged almost to beg for it!"

"For goodness sake, don't, mum! There is nothing done in the city but everybody hears of it; and what will they say of a lady wanting to borrow such a large sum, for nothing that anybody knows of? Of course, I'll lend the money!" ejaculated

Mrs. Skinflintz. "And if you don't like the old per centage—though I must say I never heard anybody object to it that wanted money in a hurry—let's make it nine thousand, and I'll take your note and the security for ten, at ten? You can't object to that, when rails pay so splendidly?"

"Very well—I'll think about it! I should be glad of the money, for every one says there never was a better opportunity than this new line, before it gets into the market. It is Lord Deville," she added, as a servant entered, who, in fact, announced that his lordship was in the library.

"I'll have the papers made out, then, mum, and bring them over to you in a day or two to sign," said Mrs. Skinflintz, rising. "You don't take snuff, I believe; but you'll be so good as to excuse me, mum, if I take a pinch, for I can't do without it now, even when I visit duchesses and countesses."

"Take as much as you like, only I am a

little in a hurry. I can't be seen in this wretched wrapper and cap," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with great urbanity. "But what duchesses and countesses do you visit? One would like to know that."

"I never split on my customers. How would you like it yourself, Mrs. Sparkleton?" said the money-lender, with considerable pathos.

"True—very true! Don't mention my name once in seven years, if you can help it. Well, have you anything more to say before I leave you? I think I had something myself, but I can't remember what. I should like some money to pay Millefleurs—at least a part of her bill—directly."

"Directly?" said Mrs. Skinflintz, in a tone which did not seem to promise such rapid compliance. "Does old Gullibull's wife dabble at all?" she added, abruptly.

"Dabble! What do you mean?"

"Buy shares. Perhaps she might want money unbeknown to Mr. Gullibull, to

transact a little business privately on her own account?"

"Oh, no! I believe she knows as little of business as I do myself. What nonsense," said Mrs. Sparkleton, laughing slightly. "And then, what security can a married woman give?"

"The best in the world—her husband. Of course, a great merchant would rather pay anything than go to prison."

"Well, I shan't recommend you to Mrs. Gullibull; she is extravagant enough already, and you forget I have an interest in keeping her intact," returned Mrs. Sparkleton, laughing still more at some ludicrous associations which arose in her mind. "But—yes, I thought there was something else I wanted: the Gullibulls are to give a great dinner-party shortly, and I am to be invited; and I want my jewels for the day, at least."

"But the gentleman who has them will not lend them unless he is paid," said the usuress.

"Use your interest; I have no doubt you have some with the *gentleman* who has got them," said Mrs. Sparkleton, with an emphasis that, in spite of her sevenfold shield of brazen skin, rather startled Mrs. Skinflintz.

"Well, if you are extremely in want of them for a day or two, I'll persuade him you are going to Court, and can't do without them; and he'll lend you them, I dare say, on the usual charge for jewels,—just the same, of course, as if they were not your own," she replied. "But don't let me keep your ladyship, mum; I can lunch alone, and can find my way out, no doubt, afterwards."

Mrs. Sparkleton had concluded her bargain and had forgotten the lunch, until reminded by this hint.

"Oh, yes, I'll order some directly. But how about the money for Millefleurs? I told you in my note that I wanted some ready money for an I. O. U., did you not bring some?" she returned.

"How much — did you want?" said the cautious widow of Abraham Skinflintz and Co.

"Two or three hundred pounds; three, if you have it."

"You can have three hundred on the old terms, for I. O. U's. are next to no security; and that, at the usual discount for ready money, will be just the two hundred and fifty I have with me."

To do Mrs. Skinflintz bare justice, even she made this proposition with some hesitation and a strong expression of doubt in her visage, as if she feared that her customer's late intercourse with the mercantile family of the Gullibulls might have made her less easy to be cheated. But Mrs. Sparkleton was thinking on quite another matter: on what she should order of Millefleurs when she had resumed credit by paying her enormous bill, in part, which was so long that she had never yet had patience to look over the items. If the rate of discount, or whatever Mrs. Skin-

flintz was pleased to call her charge, struck her as at all exorbitant, it raised such pleasant ideas simultaneously, that she never paused to consider the propriety of disputing it.

"Well, I must have the money; and I shall very soon be able to pay everything off, and not want to borrow any more. Where are the pen and ink?" And snatching one from a standish, of the most exquisite workmanship, she dipped what seemed to be a Cupid's arrow into a little fountain of black marble, watched over by doves of alabaster, and wrote the I. O. U. as carelessly as if it had been an answer to an invitation. Meanwhile Mrs. Skinflintz slowly produced a yellow canvass bag stuffed full of paper, to four times the amount in negotiation, and carefully counted out five fifty-pounds notes, which Mrs. Sparkleton transferred to a pocket of her charming little zephyr apron. She then rung the bell with vivacity. A footman, in her showy livery of white and crimson, answered.

"Lunch for Mrs. Skinflintz: whatever James has readiest; and tell Lord Deville that I was just dressing to go out, and that I will be with him in a couple of seconds." And so, with the gracefullest smile and curtsy in the world—not having yet got all she wanted—Mrs. Sparkleton wished her money-lending friend good morning, and quitted the boudoir with a light and buoyant step.

"She will soon be wanting more money since she has begun rails," mused Mrs. Skinflintz, awaiting the arrival of her meal. "And Longacres, I remember, they said, was a great bargain; and Tobias talks of buying land and becoming a gentleman in some county; and perhaps when the dishabilities is removed, he'll be a Hem. P.; and since he won't folly his father's business, perhaps I might do worse than get Longacres for him."

A page entering with the lunch interrupted this reverie,—the footman considering himself infinitely too stylish a personage

to wait on a visitor whom he strongly suspected, in spite of the honourable nature of her reception, to be some sort of a tradeswoman, or, as he expressed it, "a snobbess."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT an altogether different kind of a Mrs. Sparkleton was that which in a few minutes descended the stairs, in perfect promenade costume, from the one which had taken breakfast with the relict of the firm of Abraham Skinflintz and Co., the mother of the future Tobias Skinflintz, Esq., of Longacres.

She had resumed all her natural coquetry and vivacity of manner, and looked the beauty and gay leader of fashion which she was universally considered—ay, every inch! From the summit of her graceful plume of drooping silver feathers, frosted to represent snow on ice (very refreshing for the warm weather, which it then was), to the tip of

her matchless little lilac silk boots, Mrs. Sparkleton might have been pronounced the perfection of dress. Nor must the reader marvel at this, considering how brief a space she seemed to have devoted to the toilette, so as not to keep Lord Deville waiting an instant longer than she might in strict politeness. Her costume was the result of many days' deep thought and deliberation, and, like many another impromptu, had been devised with great leisure and study.

Neither would we have it thought that Mrs. Sparkleton had taken so much pains in planning her attire to captivate her present visiter. We scorn all attempts to deceive the reader, as *some authors do*—but, thank heaven, we are not as they!—who endeavour to keep the real facts of the story as much as possible unknown and unsuspected by the diligent reader until he gets near the end. We are willing that he should be as much in the secrets of our personages as we are ourselves, having little other intention than to relate exactly, for

the benefit of future ages, what we have seen or heard in our own. If we authors are compelled to be great eavesdroppers, in consequence, the fault lies in the curiosity of mankind, and in their anxiety to ascertain what one another are doing. For though it may be true that half the world does not know how the other half lives, (much less how it dies!) it cannot be denied that there is in general a very great desire to collect all possible information on the subject. And as to the illiberal insinuation which has been thrown out against one of the most entertaining species of modern fiction—the novel of fashionable life—that it is principally founded on the on-dits of footmen and ladies' maids, we hold it to be the greatest compliment that could be paid to it. Who so likely as those authorities to have a perfect knowledge and information as to what is going on in the houses of the great? It may be safely averred that they often know a great deal more than the masters and doers of the same.

Mrs. Sparkleton, as we have said, had really no wish or intention to captivate her noble visiter—at least, on this occasion. Perhaps she had found out the futility of the attempt on some former one, and was satisfied with having it generally reported and believed that Viscount Deville was greatly smitten with her charms, and sighed in her train, without herself giving so much credit to the rumour as other people did. That alone was a distinction which might well have flattered the pride of any woman, for his lordship was in high esteem and rivalry with the fair sex, and in great honour with his own. The reasons for this respect were manifold. First and foremost, he was rich, and of high rank and family connexions; secondly, he was a courtier, in favour, and made excellent speeches in parliament, when he chose to take the trouble, which were of great service to the ministry; thirdly, he was a man of a convivial and sarcastic wit, which, in turn, recommended him to both sexes; and was of high character; for, in

consideration of all these circumstances, society had agreed totally to overlook and forget, or only to remember to his honour, some little circumstances which had distinguished his earlier youth. Such as running away with a particular friend's wife; a feat he had accomplished before he attained his majority. But as he gave the injured party every satisfaction, that is to say, as he shot him in the right hip, so as to make him limp for life, and defended an action with such a preponderance of legal skill that he got off with very slight damages; and as he had not committed the incalculable imprudence of marrying the woman he had seduced, he was soon restored to the estimation and honour of society. His company was universally sought; and, at forty-five, excepting that he was perhaps still a little too often seen at the rouge-et-noir tables, he was considered by all mothers as a most suitable and desirable match for any of their daughters. The peccadillo of his youth, which had consigned the female part-

ner in it to shame, indigence, and perpetual Paris, seemed only to quicken the enthusiasm of the ladies in his favour, doubtless from the compassion and tenderness natural to the female sex.

If Mrs. Sparkleton had possessed no other feeling in the world but vanity, that solitary one would accordingly have required that she should be well content to be the object of Lord Deville's public attentions. But she had many others, and though too thoroughly well-bred to suffer them ever to reach the headstrong name of passions, of a strength sufficient to induce her to become a tacit accomplice in a deception which, for some reason or other, the Viscount was anxious to play off on the world. However, as Mrs. Sparkleton did not even acknowledge the existence of the sentiment in question to herself, and would have been in the highest degree shocked if it had been placed before her in plain English, we do not feel justified at this stage of our narrative in further alluding to it.

Lord Deville was a very—we were going to say—handsome man, but, on reflection, retract the epithet. He was not handsome, but he had been. At present he was perhaps a little withered; the lines of his face were a little too deeply marked; his complexion was a trifle too yellow and pale. But his eyes were still very good; his features preserved their aristocratic contour; his whiskers were still of an excellent black, and we do not believe that they owed anything to art; his hair, though somewhat thinned by the scissors of time, was so dextrously brushed that the bald ring on the crown was only visible to malignant people, at elevations which few obtained over him, for he was tall. Then he in nowise resembled the vulgar, who, in general, at his age, get fat and protuberate, Falstaff-wise. He preserved a gentlemanly, greyhound-like slenderness which it was not in the power of all the excellent viands wherein he indulged (he was a great epicure) to damage. His dress alone made half a dozen years of his

age doubtful, it was so masterly contrived! And yet no one that looked at him ever thought of his dress: if anything struck the unskilled beholder at all, it was the unrivalled whiteness of his linen, and the unrivalled blackness of his boots. These two articles never changed. No temptation of arabesque shirts or drab cloth uppers ever shook the fixed soul of Viscount Deville in these respects. He took no pride in making it doubtful whether he was a gentleman or a drayman. Whoever looked at him pronounced him instantly the former, and perhaps had also a strong misgiving that he was one that had a seat in the House of Lords. The lappets of his coat had somehow or another the appearance. Heaven knows how: we do not.

Lord Deville's greetings to Mrs. Sparkleton were seldom so warm in private as they were in public. He disliked giving women too much encouragement. But his manner was everything; it was so perfectly polished, so meaning and so un-

meaning, that no possible fault could be found with it.

"Ah, Mrs. Sparkleton! how lucky I am to have found you at home!, and just on the wing, too! One never hardly finds you at home now: how is that?"

"Why, I really don't know—unless the reason be that I am often abroad.—I have so much business to attend to, my poor head is kept quite in a whirl, and I am obliged to run about everywhere. *But,*" she added, with a significant smile, "I think your lordship and I meet so frequently elsewhere, that we need not afflict ourselves greatly that we meet so seldom here."

"Ah, very true; we visit the Fitzhautons, both of us, a good deal; and really, they are very pleasant people. And the Gullibulls are so diverting! I have a great friendship for Fitzhauton, and I believe you have taken quite a fancy to his young wife."

"I like her well enough, poor creature!

A harmless sort of girl, I think, but quite a spoiled child!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, with a pretty visible contempt mingling with the encomium. "And besides, she has such city ideas—so puffed up with the money they have among them, that really—but I like her, certainly. Your lordship must not flatter yourself that it is because one is almost sure to find you there, that people go so much to Fitzhauton's."

"Nay, I should want common penetration if I thought so," replied the Viscount, carelessly, but emphatically. "I understand that you have kindly undertaken the care of her introduction to society? Of course, there is no one in her own family fit to do it—in fact, no one that anybody knows among them. And it is the kinder of you, because, you know, during my poor friend, Sparkleton's life, when it was the fashion for every one to adore you, Lord Fitzhauton —— Ah! what a beautiful colour you blush, Mrs. Sparkleton! I never saw any rouge to compare with it!"

"If I thought so—if I thought that people ever really entertained so preposterous an idea," said Mrs. Sparkleton, with all the vivacity of negation inspired by a disagreeable truth, "I would never set foot in Lord Fitzhauton's house again."

"That would be the very way to confirm an absurd report," replied his lordship. "My dear Mrs. Sparkleton, scandal is like one's other enemies, often outfaced by boldness. I have known several innocent people do themselves more damage by their precautions against being suspected, than if they had actually done what they were accused of. The more people talk about your going so much to Fitzhauton's, the more you ought to go. Innocence is so unconscious! it is only guilt that knows how to avoid censure, as it is only those who are aware of the weak parts of a fortress who post defences at them. But how I am sermonizing—and I really came for no other purpose on earth than to ask you to allow me the honour of being your squire to

the Flower Show at Chiswick; for, of course you go—you, that are so fond of flowers!"

"I don't know that," said Mrs. Sparkleton, pettishly. "They have not given me a prize this year; and I am quite positive that nobody's carnations could fairly compete with mine. I consider it shameful injustice! You saw them, Lord Deville, at Longacres; and do you think it in nature to beat my lovely Fleur-de-Marie, as I called it?"

"Nothing—but your own complexion at this moment, Mrs. Sparkleton," replied the gallant Viscount, and the compliment instantly calmed the excited feelings of the injured flower-fancier. "I should *think*," he continued; "but then one ought to see Fleur-de-Marie in competition with her successful rivals, before we can positively determine whether she has been cheated out of her due honours or not, just as one ought to see Mrs. Sparkleton in a crowd of the handsomest women of London, before that one can pronounce with certainty——"

"Well, wait till then," my lord," interrupted the lady, but evidently, by her smile, continuing to be soothed. "Not that I think it will happen very soon; for it is really quite surprising how few good-looking women one meets with in society. But I am glad you are of my opinion about my poor Fleur-de-Marie. If I meet any of the judges, I shall scold them famously; and mind, you are to back me."

"Against the world! But, upon my word, I really think you ruined poor Fleur-de-Marie's chances yourself, by calling it such a name," said the Viscount. "There are a number of very religious people on the tribunal this year, and they don't like the book whence you got it; and, besides, it is a popish sort of a name. Miss Scurmucheon, I am sure, would give her full vote and interest against it."

"The envious old wretch! so she would," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with renewed excitement. "How I do hate that horrid old frump! and, as to religion, except that she

goes to church three times every Sunday, when she is not afraid of its raining, to spoil her antiquated old prig of a footman's livery, and shows her withered visage whenever there is a meeting of the cants at Exeter Hall, she has not a thousandth part so much religion in her as a single green leaf of my sweet Fleur-de-Marie!"

"But if the religious party is in ascendancy this year, of course the flowers would be judged according to their fancies," said Lord Deville, with a playful smile. "However, one thing is certain, that every one one knows is going to the Show; that all the handsomest women in London will be there; and that, unless you are afraid to let me form a judgment on the matter, you will be there too, to justify your claims to the supremacy."

"Nonsense! But no one ever expects Lord Deville to speak without a compliment or a sarcasm, and sometimes he manages to unite both," said Mrs. Sparkleton, but not unpleasedly. Flattery, how-

ever gross, never really offends, whatever those sagacious persons who seldom experience its effects may have declared. Still, there was something in Lord Deville's eye which did not exactly please her; and she added, with vivacity, "Oh, yes! I know you are jesting; I know very well, that if you had the apple to give, it is not to me you would give it! And really, my lord, though flattered by the attention, I don't see how I can accept. It's all nonsense, certainly; but it looks so odd to see us Paul-and-Virginia-ing it about everywhere! People will begin to talk of us!"

"So much the better!" replied his lordship.

Mrs. Sparkleton glanced at him; and for a moment a thought passed through her mind, that, after all, if nothing better could be done—if Lord Deville should at any time really be in earnest—there was no disputing that he was a man of large landed property, and a viscount.

"How is it so much the better?" she

replied, rather cautiously; but still it was an opening, which a nobleman with such advantages, who had a proposal in his intent, might have taken. He did not.

"We go so much to the Fitzhautons, that it keeps people from forming absurd conjectures," he said, quite calmly.

"Especially Fitzhauton himself," thought Mrs. Sparkleton; continuing, with a very proper conscientious feeling, "But that is his affair; and if *she* is such a fool as to think it fashionable to carry on a flirtation, and encourage Deville, that is her fault; *I* can't possibly know how to do about the shares, unless I have Mr. Gullibull's advice, and I can't see him without going to his son-in-law's house; consequently ——"

The consequence the brilliant widow drew from these premises was, that she would go to the Flower Show. She would not own it, however, all at once, till she had endeavoured to ascertain Lord Deville's real object in wishing to go with her to it.

"I should not much mind about going,

were it only to show people I am not at all vexed about my Fleur de Marie," she replied. "But who is going besides? I can't undertake to philander about with your lordship, tête-à-tête. Could we not get some other lady to go with us?—Not your terrific old aunt; and pray don't mention my sisters!"

"Lady Fitzhauton will go, if you will," replied Lord Deville, eagerly. "Fitzhauton will not go; and so, unless you will go—I mean, I have no doubt she will go."

"But why will not Fitzhauton go?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, in a tone of marked disapprobation. "I suppose he thinks it a stupid, dull thing, as I do, to go about staring at plants and trashy foreign weeds in pots. No, I don't think I shall go."

"He has a new horse to show off on in the Park, or some nonsense of that kind," replied Deville. "But that need not hinder us; and besides, surely, Mrs. Sparkleton, you have sufficient influence over him,

—in your charming way—to induce him to go with us!"

"Pho, nonsense! a little laughing chatter whenever we meet; but as to influence, it is quite ridiculous to call it so. Why don't Lady Fitzhauton herself get him to go?"

"She cannot, she complains: she says he will do nothing she asks him now; thinks only of himself and his own gratifications—which is likely enough. And, besides, they have been married now a year and a half, and, of course, he is tired with humouring all the little fancies of his beautiful parvenue. But I do believe, if he thought you were going, the pleasure of your company is so great, that ——"

"Beautiful!" interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton, with indignation. "What, Lord Deville, such a judge as you are, and call such a woman as that beautiful?"

"There's a freshness—an oddity, if you will—about her, rather engaging—rather refreshing," replied his lordship. "But I certainly don't call her beautiful; only the

thought is never well out of one's mind in Mrs. Sparkleton's presence."

"Oh, what a flatterer you are! But you must allow that she is *gauche*, *niaise*, thoroughly *parvenue?*" returned the lady.

"Timid and awkward, to a degree! She is dreadfully nervous in her new society; but that is what amuses one. One is tired of always seeing the right thing done in the right way," said the Viscount, smiling. "And it is so diverting to see her efforts to become *comme il faut*, and to assist in forming her judgment, and instructing her in the mysteries of *ton*. But when she has fairly vanquished her *mauvaise honte*, she will be a star of the first magnitude among us, or I am very much mistaken."

"It will not be long, then; she has all the necessary plebeian insolence and conceit of wealth at the bottom of her wonderful simplicity and docility? But, meanwhile, I own I am grieved to see poor Fitzhauton's confusion when surrounded by his new relations; but he richly deserves it."

"Their manners are, perhaps, a little strange—but then, they have so much money — and Fitzhauton is a very good fellow, and is very fond of his bargain, in reality. I almost think, at times, he loves her," said Deville, carelessly looking at his watch. "But I have exceeded my half hour, and——"

"Loves her!—well, they have not been married long enough to hate each other," interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton, with vivacity. "But, as for love! There was too much money in the case for there to be much love."

"There was probably quite as much policy as sentiment in the affair," said the Viscount, calmly. "But still I do think that if Miss Gullibull had been lame, hump-backed, and of a very sallow complexion—I don't believe Fitzhauton could have made up his mind to marry her at any price."

"I don't believe quite that he would—he does rather admire beauty in women, I

know,—and nobody can deny that Lady Fitzhauton is pretty—so if she will go to the Flower Show—that is, if we can make up a party, for I own I don't want to make one of a pair of dangling milk-pails on a man's arms—and I'm sure I think it must be quite a nuisance to the man himself, to have, as it were, to keep halving himself, and talking nonsense to two people at once—I'll go. That is, I'll go first to Fitzhauton's, and you can come on after, and see whether I have been able to get any one to go with us."

"A *partie carrée* would be by far the best, dear Mrs. Sparkleton!" said his lordship. "I know I should enjoy Lady Fitzhauton's simplicity unspeakably, and you and he have a flirtation of some years standing, to amuse one another with—so we might have quite a pleasant day of it."

"Oh, nonsense; our flirtation, of course, ended, when poor dear Colonel Sparkleton died—it became quite another affair then, you know. And now Fitzhauton is mar-

ried, it is out of the question; only you love to make a jest of one," said Mrs. Sparkleton, rather pettishly. "But, if you have anywhere to go, you had better go directly—and you will find me at Lady Fitzhauton's in half an hour."

"*Au revoir*, then—yes, I have just to look in at the club, and see what is going on; but I shall not be so long," replied his lordship, rising; and Mrs. Sparkleton escorted him to the library door. There, however, he paused, and gently pressing the tips of the fair hand extended to him, observed, "But I can't help congratulating you on how enchanting you look this morning, dear Mrs. Sparkleton! I know not whom you might not rival, or enslave —if you would only take the trouble."

"But I do," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with a significant smile.

"Cruel, cruel! *Au revoir, au revoir!*" murmured the Viscount as he closed the door, and made his way through two or three bowing lackeys to the street.

"How very old he looks when one looks fairly into him; he must be more than forty-five," soliloquized Mrs. Sparkleton, after his exit. "And I believe he is just as great a rake as ever, only he knows better how to hide it. Those old fellows are really a great deal worse than the young ones! But it is a credit in society to have a man so sought dangling after one; else it is the most impudent thing, and really not quite proper! But I wonder whether Fitzhauton *is* tired of his stupid wife, and whether he thought I was not going to the Flower Show? And I'm not dressed well enough for it. I must put on another shawl at least."

The result of this meditation was, that the bell was rung for Mademoiselle Florine, the lady's maid, and orders were given to expedite a change of toilette. Florine was not in the least surprised at this, although she had dressed her mistress only half an hour before. To the contrary, she seemed delighted, and, as it appeared, with reason. "Ah, quel plaisir! since dere is Madame's

once former femme, and my particulair friend, dat recommend me to her place, *femme d'un génie beau et naturel*, who vill vraiment please to see me fulfil my duty, who is below, and whom I will summon to de presence of Madame."

CHAPTER IV.

INTO the presence of Madame accordingly was ushered, in a brief period, the possessor of this "*genie beau et naturel,*" which, in the course of a few months, she was destined to display in a manner not at all contemplated at the moment by her encomiastic friend, nor probably, by herself. *Nemo repenté*—the proverb is something musty. Mrs. Redgold, we may venture to say, was at this period quite unconscious that she was in possession of those great qualities which were one day to render her famous throughout the length and breadth of the land; to make her slightest sayings and doings recorded and perused with more

curiosity and interest than those of the greatest sages of ancient or of modern times, and to elevate her to a comparison with the most magnificent creations of the tragic muse —with Lady Macbeth and Clytemnestra! She was only at present a French femme de chambre, who had married an English railway guard, and, after spending her youth amidst the refinement, splendour, and luxury of great households, found herself condemned to poverty and a little hovel of a residence in the Borough for the rest of her life, apparently.

She was—but why should we describe her, since every family possesses its indifferently well executed portrait of the heroine? Since the most graphic pens have exhausted the eloquence of ink in describing her person, its elegant tournure, and have with regret admitted that her face was not so pleasing as the rest of her tall and well-formed figure? And that figure was so tastefully and artistically dressed that it must have excited admiration in all capable

of appreciating the science displayed, even if they had discerned, what was perhaps a little evident, that the garb itself was a relic of a more prosperous past, and was now considerably the worse for wear.

Mrs. Sparkleton received her former minister of the graces with pleasure. She knew her to be an admirable artist. She was also a woman of a compliant and amiable turn of mind, which is one of the reasons why people of rank prefer foreigners in their more immediate personal service, all John Bull's family partaking more or less of his churlish independence of character, and dull uncouth way of thinking and expressing himself on topics. That is to say, Mrs. Redgold was always of the opinion of the lady whose hair she was dressing, on whatever subject, divine or human, and had the art of appearing to be so in the most free and unconstrained manner in the world. On this occasion, Florine also evinced her superiority to another of our national failings. It is well known how assiduously

those among us who ought to be the best judges in any kind of art, being those who practice it, apply themselves to depreciate and deprive one another's excellencies of opportunities of exhibition. Artists, authors, men of science, professors in all the faculties, are at it incessantly. But Florine readily resigned her comb and brush and her mistress's head to the cares of her skilful predecessor, watching her labours with an eye that beamed only admiration and delight; with a very different eye, indeed, from those which on the hanging committees of the Royal Academy appoint the lights for achievements of the brush which are neither performed by the judges themselves nor by their friends.

We have no intention to attempt to give a factitious interest to our work, by exactly retailing the conversation which passed between Mrs. Sparkleton and her illustrious attendant. But as a gold-worshipper, who carried the great principle of that religion out to its fullest extent, though scarcely to

what logicians call the *reductio ad absurdum*, and having legitimate reason to introduce Mrs. Redgold on the scene, since it was certainly essential, that Mrs. Sparkleton should be dressed to her satisfaction before she could sally forth on those adventures which form the staple of our history, we have thought proper so to do.

Great examples, in fact, are not wanting to authorize the step, even if we, in our self-sufficient and self-relying dignity, needed any. It is well known that the commonplace books of the majority of our modern authors are merely excerpta, or ingeniously disguised extracts from police reports. The great Fielding himself scarcely waited till Jonathan Wild was cut down, ere he commenced the memorable narrative of his deeds which has come down with so much applause to posterity. And we really do not see why the personal details and alities which are found to give such a piquancy to modern novel-writing should be exclusively devoted to the portraiture of distinguished or titled

personages, who have only foibles or ridiculous peculiarities to contribute to the amusement of the reader. This *en passant*, and not at all as a thing necessary to make an apology about.

Mrs. Sparkleton deigned to inquire into the present state and fortunes of her former attendant at some length during the operations of the toilette. But we are not at all sure that she took any particular interest in the answers she received until she learned that Mrs. Redgold's husband was somehow or another connected with the absorbing topic in her own mind. "On a railway? What line? Has it a good traffic? I dare say he could give me an idea on this point that might be useful."

The melancholy reply, however, came that he was discharged from his situation, and Mrs. Sparkleton's evanescent interest vanished. She promised, however, to try and do something for the "poor fellow," and possibly might have done so if she

had ever again thought on the subject. Besides, she had good reason for not troubling herself any more about the matter, since Mrs. Redgold herself could not conceal her contempt for the character, understanding, and debauched meanness of the personage whom the law had appointed to be her companion for life.

"But if he gets drunk, why do you let him have any money? He could not get drunk without money, could he?" said Mrs. Sparkleton. The Italian princess, who, being informed of the sufferings of the poor for want of bread, wondered why they did not eat cakes, by no means monopolized all the knowledge of the condition of the poorer classes among ladies of quality. "It is very distressing, *very*, when people go on so! But why don't you take in all the things they publish now-a-days, teaching people how to be good—the cheap literature things—and make him read them? I really think some of *us* might be the

better for a course of stuff of that kind!—
but one has no time to do anything—and I
am in a great hurry to get to Lady Fitz-
hauton's—and I don't think I shall be
there at midnight, if you are as long with
this side of my head as the other."

CHAPTER V.

We leave Mrs. Sparkleton's society for a few minutes, to hasten before her whither she was going, that we may put the reader in possession of some necessary preliminaries to his full understanding of a subsequent scene.

We do not intend to be more specific in indicating the locality of Fitzhauton House, than we were in mentioning the exact street and number in which we first made the courteous reader's acquaintance. Such information would, indeed, be superfluous to the initiated, and it can be of little consequence to those out of the pale. Suffice it to say, that we are now in one of

the most fashionable residences in *the* most fashionable square of London, entering the breakfast-room with a footman, who carries rolls and eggs on a silver salver, and who is followed by my lady's page, bearing *her* notes and cards of the previous day and the morning in question on a similar convenience.

It was rather late to be breakfasting at one o'clock, even in that district, which likes the earth to be thoroughly aired for its reception before it ventures to leave its couch. But the fagged looks and yawning gestures of the noble master of the mansion, who, in a splendid morning gown which might have served for the robe of ceremony of a first-class mandarin, reclined in an arm-chair with a paper in his hand, seemed to indicate that he himself found he had risen inconveniently early. He was what is called a *very* handsome young man, when the owner of a set of regular features, lively eyes, well cut mouth, and plentiful dark brown hair and whiskers, has the good

fortune to be only twenty-eight, and a peer of the realm. His fine moustache and general figure were also so decidedly military, that he evidently united the advantages of a popular and dashing profession to those of high rank and birth, and was, in short, everything desirable in a husband and a gentleman.

Nevertheless, the young lady who sat opposite to him, and who was entitled to call herself his lordship's wife, with all the emphasis derived from the fact that she had been united to him under that title by a bishop, appeared not to enjoy herself so much in the position as one would have thought. There was an air of sullenness spread over her fair and pretty countenance, something disdainful and pettish in the very ringlets of her light, short, golden curls. We may be mistaken, but there was even an extra pinkishness about the edges of the eyelids, which might have suggested to close observers that the lady had been recently weeping, or, at all events,

suppressing tears, by the favourite operation which so often fails, of rubbing the eyes to make them dry. Her small red mouth was also pouting and vexed in its expression; but, in justice to Lord Fitzhauton, we must say, that it was rather with the angry pettishness of a school-girl, deprived of some favourite nonsense, than of an injured woman or wife. In fact, the whole figure was too soft, plump, excessively fair, and low in stature, or even as Mrs. Sparkleton phrased it, "dumpy," to give one the idea of a person of very strong passions of any sort. It exactly answered, even to its too short and too fat fingers, white though they were, and laden with rings, to what one would expect to find the Lady Fitzhauton to be, whom the fashionable world, on her first appearance in it, had pronounced, even before they knew her history, a *parvenue*.

Such undoubtedly she was, if being the daughter of a Russian tallow merchant and corn factor, the spoiled child of wealth and

vanity, and the wife of an equally spoiled son of rank, luxury, and dissipation, could make a woman merit the designation. The only daughter of a man of enormous wealth, which he had made altogether by frugality and business-habits in early life, and, later, by extensive and judicious speculations in trade, people whose hands were unsullied by industry of any kind, had certainly a right to look down upon a person who intruded into their ranks, from such a quarter, with contempt. But she had also committed the crime of marrying a young nobleman who, up to the time when it was ascertained that his extravagance had almost hopelessly involved him, was considered a match, and a very desirable one, for young women of the first quality. His wife's large fortune re-established his affairs; but Lord Fitzhauton had himself a perpetual and distressing consciousness or apprehension that, in marrying the tallow merchant's daughter, he had forfeited caste.

Moreover, the family connexions which

he had thus formed were not of a kind to diminish the opprobrium which the young Earl felt he had brought on himself. Lady Fitzhauton's father was, indeed, what might be called a man of business. His talk was a ledger, read aloud. In vain was he an alderman, who had been a Lord Mayor; an M.P. for some remote shipping town, where qualifications more tangible than speechifying and making motions in parliament about nothing, and to end in nothing, were held in esteem. The taint of trade was in all he said, did, thought, looked, imagined!—hopelessly so.

And then the mother! Imagine a woman of large coarse features, not slightly marked with the smallpox; sprung from petty shopkeepers; good-hearted in the main, but proud as Mammon of her wealth; bold, energetic, ungrammatical, and firmly determined to thrust her way into the "best society," willy-nilly, ever since she had been presented at Court, and feasted a royal duke as Lady Mayoress! Imagine this

woman, perpetually on the alert for means to accomplish her purpose, as if the society in question were a commingling of beatified spirits in bliss; raised at least to the seventh heaven by the marriage of her daughter with a nobleman, whose descent could be traced back seven hundred years—in the Peerage; imagine Mrs. Gullibull, of Cornhill, and Putney Villa, fully determined to be the mother (as she was), of Lady Fitzhauton, and to share in all the grandeurs and distinctions to which the family wealth had elevated her, and, gentle reader, you have some idea of the sufferings of the noble son-in-law.

Not that he was by nature excessively sensitive. Lord Fitzhauton was neither better nor worse than young men of quality and military men are usually found. He was fond of pleasure, careless, extravagant, a little vain of his person, without troubling himself particularly about his ancestry until he had married his wealthy *parvenue*. They then occurred as a reproach. He had

lived a dissipated, lounging life, which, in some points, might be said to defy and outrage society—but had become singularly sensitive to its opinions and reproaches on one wherein he could not certainly be considered morally to blame. He had even a considerable touch of honour and gentlemanly feeling in his composition; and, in spite of the extreme necessity of his affairs, persuaded himself that he was very much in love with Miss Gullibull, when he married her. And, perhaps, he was as much in love with her as he had been with a dozen other pretty girls in his time. At all events, he thought so, and it acquitted him, in his own eyes, of anything mean or mercenary in the alliance he formed. On the contrary, he persuaded himself and his aunt—a maiden lady of mature age, who being left his only near relative in his childhood, conceived herself bound to spoil him in every possible manner, to make up for the loss of his parents—that he sacrificed the pride of his ancestral rank to the warmth of a modern attachment.

But this season of passion, if passion it ever was, was over now. The honeymoon was thoroughly set; and we are afraid that, unlike the celestial orb which measures its duration, it is not always cut up to make little stars in the heavens of matrimony. It had never entered Lord Fitzhauton's imagination that he was to continue playing the lover to his wife; while the pampered and indulged only daughter and heiress was not prepared to give up a single iota of her claims to be the sole and exclusive object of notice and adoration to all around her. She felt at once uncomfortable, repulsed, and indignant in the society she had entered, and yet longed for nothing so much as to be considered perfectly *au fait* in its manners and usages. She resented her husband's fashionable indifference without endeavouring, or, in fact, knowing how to remove it. On this occasion, for example, she knew that it was polished in her to seem unaware that Lord Fitzhauton had not returned from a dinner-party at one of

his military friends, "a lot of old messmen," until the sun had risen to guide him to his solitary apartment. At the same time, she did know it, as her eyes attested; but, without saying a word on the subject, after a cold morning salutation, she had seated herself at breakfast, took up the "Post," and seemed to be completely absorbed in perusing a description of some duchess's dress at a late drawing-room.

Lord Fitzhauton was jaded with his night's amusement, and had often enough enjoyed a conversational tête-à-tête with his spouse, not to have any particular desire to commence one. But his head ached, and he was rather in the humour for a "tiff." And besides, there was not much in the paper that diverted him, for he took little interest in politics, and there was nothing about the army or the opera in the journal he held in his hand. So he threw it aside, sent some booby fellow or another to the devil, for bringing the rolls up cold, and "Well, Lady Fitz-

hauton, why don't you speak?" concluded the harangue.

"For fear it should be vulgar to talk with my tongue," replied her ladyship, drily, and continuing her earnest perusal of the interesting article alluded to above.

"Really, Annie," (Lady Fitzhauton's name was Ann, but her husband had softened that stern plebeian monosyllable into this) "really, Annie, it is quite absurd to see the manner you whimper on, and never open your mouth to one, except to say something sharp and snappish! How could I help it?—men that have been abroad these three or four years—and Frampton's such a devil of a fellow when he gets the glass in his hand—and so full of anecdote! I declare, I was nigh killed with laughter while I heard him tell some of his droll stories. They have been in Ireland, you know; and it is such a place for fun, I wish I had been there. I am sorry now, that I parted with my commission—though, to be sure, the Guards don't often go there;

and, unless there's a row, I don't suppose they will."

"You sold your commission before *I* knew you!" replied the great fortune, with a disdainful allusion, not unfelt by the object.

"Upon my word, Lady Fitzhauton, you are quite insulting! always thinking of your confounded money! I wish I could pay your father back every stiver of it, and I have no doubt I shall be able some day, and I will. I'll break the entail, or do something of that kind, rather than be annoyed with your perpetual sneers."

"You can't, sir; else, I dare say you would like it well enough: and, if you could send me back with my money, as you call it, too, I suppose it would be still more pleasant. I don't believe—I am sure of it, you never cared a single farthing about me!"

"Ah, the people of your family are always estimating the value of things in money! None but a *parvenue*, as you call yourself,

would have thought of calculating a man's regard for you in that way! 'Never cared a farthing for you,' indeed! My dear girl, I could prove the contrary of that, for I cared a hundred thousand pounds for you, the very day I married you!"

"And, besides, papa paid off two mortgages on your Devonshire estates, and mamma—mamma furnished the whole house in the Terrace before we got this house from the man you had lent it to," continued the heiress, perhaps a little missing the point of the marital retort. "I am sure I wish I had never left them; I was happier, far happier, at Putney Villa."

"It is not my fault; you hate to be happy anywhere,—at least, you never make the slightest effort to be so, or to make other people so," replied the Earl, yawning. "You will not do as any one asks you; indeed, if I request you to do a thing, it is quite a sufficient reason for you not to do it."

"Why, what have you asked me to do that I have not done?" returned Lady

Fitzhauton, laying down her paper, and obviously preparing for a matrimonial explanation—alias, quarrel—in earnest.

"Oh, I don't know—I can't be bored to remember—thousands of things! You will not hear a word of advice from my aunt; and she tells me that she tries incessantly to make you understand what you ought to do; and she is a person of great experience," said Lord Fitzhauton.

"A disagreeable old maid, who tries to persuade one one's a fool, and to lord it over one in one's own house!" retorted the lady. "If you want her, you may have her altogether, but I'll not stay in the same house with her to be niggled to death."

"'Niggled!' what strange words you have! I wish you would try at least and break yourself of those absurd, unmeaning words, that nobody understands out of a girls' schoolroom, or the city," said Lord Fitzhauton, peevishly.

"I am sure you have plenty of words that no one understands out of a barrack or

a stupid drawing-room, where people burst into senseless laughs, they don't know why themselves, though they all pretend to understand; and force one to do the same," replied the young wife.

"And as to my aunt's domineering over you, and trash of that sort, you talk quite absurdly. There's not a more indulgent woman living than Miss Scurmucheon, and all she wants is to try and make you like—like other people—like a woman of quality."

"Would you like me to be like Lady Brahazon? I see, in the paper this morning, that she has eloped with an Irish gentleman, and left her husband and children to look after themselves," returned Lady Fitzhauton, with a triumphant glance at her lord.

"Not that, exactly. You know what I mean, Annie, only your sole study is to vex one!" said her lord, somewhat discomfitedly. "But can't you take some refined woman of fashion as a model, and imitate her?"

"Whom shall I take, then?" replied his

lady, not quite so carelessly and scornfully as she looked. "Will Baroness Alamode do? only I really think I should die of fatigue in imitating her, for she runs about all day and half the night; and is to be seen everywhere, I do believe, but at home."

"No; but is there not Lady Lofty, and——?"

"Head over ears in debt, Mrs. Sparkleton tells me!" interrupted the wife. "And don't you think you can make debts fast enough yourself, Fitzhauton?"

"Why not take. Mrs. Sparkleton, then, herself? She *is* a charming woman, and allowed to be of the first fashion!" said his lordship, eagerly.

"I am sure she comes here often enough to give me the opportunity," replied Lady Fitzhauton, somewhat drily. "But I do like her because she dislikes a great number of people that I do! I don't think she dotes to distraction on Miss Scurmucheon any more than I do, stylish woman as she is!

But would you like me to flirt so much as she does with people?"

"Why, you know, she is not a married woman now," said the Earl, a little embarrassed with this question. "Besides, she is going to marry Lord Deville, and what may be perfectly easy and graceful in a practised woman of fashion, would seem quite ridiculous in you. No, for Heaven's sake, don't attempt flirtation! You will be sure to do something silly, for you are not at all meant for that sort of thing. A person must be thoroughbred to venture on such ticklish paces! Pray don't make yourself and me ridiculous by attempting it."

"If I take Mrs. Sparkleton for a model in one thing, I will in everything!" replied the heiress, obstinately.

"Well, do as you like; I am determined not to annoy myself about your perverse disposition any more," returned the Earl. "Go on your own way, as I shall on mine; only one little favour do let me beg of you. Whenever we have a dinner party again,

don't purposely invite your mother merely because you know she will talk and go on in such a singular manner;—I mean, unless we are by ourselves, or anything of that sort; for I was never more wretched in my life than when she was diverting the company on Thursday with her opinions on the proper way to serve up a *banket*, as she called it, in style."

"What need mamma care? She did not owe any of them any money," returned the daughter, not a little, and not unjustly, nettled. "But you can do as you please. All I can say is, that if mamma may not come to our dinner parties, neither will I. I don't care who laughs, nor who sneers, for I have never seen any of them yet that dared do so outright. And mamma likes to come, and she shall come; and I am sure there was no one there dressed half so grand, or that had so many diamonds! I heard Miss Scurmucheon herself own that there was more upon her than would have

dressed out half-a-dozen old duchesses, and things of that sort, on a birthday."

"No doubt—that's what I complain of," returned the Earl. "But I don't mean when we have a large dinner party, but when there are only about eight or ten people, as there were the other day; for in those small parties, people must talk—and, besides, your mother *will.*"

"Well, and I am sure it is quite as amusing to hear mamma talk as anybody else!"

"A good deal more so—people evidently think *that;* Mrs. Sparkleton herself likes to bring her out," replied Fitzhauton, greatly vexed that he could not, without openly affronting her, bring his wife to take his own view of the question.

"I am sure it is far more snobbish—or *parvenu*, as you call it—to be ashamed of one's relations, when they have done nothing to be ashamed of! It is not mamma's fault that she was not born a baron's

daughter, like Mrs. Sparkleton. I don't know that people are at all more honest for being so," resumed the citizen-wife.

"Honest! what stupid words you do apply! Who talked of honesty?" said the noble husband. "I wish you would try and understand what one says!—and there, you are continually rubbing your eyes, to spoil them, and make people think we quarrel! There is nothing more vulgar than for a man and his wife to quarrel;—and hark! isn't there a rat-tat at the door?"

"I suppose it is Mrs. Sparkleton: Lord Deville said she would come—something about a flower-show," said Lady Fitz-hauton, rather brightening up.

"Are you at home? Yes; do dry your eyes, and don't let us be making a sort of scene. You may as well be at home, for I am sure it is not at all pleasant to—— Who is it, John?"

"The Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton, my lord."

"Oh, very well!—I *am* at home to the *Honourable* Mrs. Sparkleton," exclaimed Lady Fitzhauton, with an emphasis not lost on the Earl. "I am always at home to the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton! I mean to imitate her in everything."

"I shall leave you to your gossip, then, and go and see how Croakley's gout is getting on; it's two or three days since I went," said Fitzhauton, with either great carelessness, or the affectation of it. "I don't much care to get entangled in a chatter with Mrs. Sparkleton: she is what they call a fascinating woman—and so she is, in talk—though for my part——"

"Did you not see Sir George Croakley among the deaths, in the paper, this morning?" interrupted Lady Fitzhauton: "I am sure it was plain enough to be seen."

"Oh! is he dead? I scarcely noticed it. And here she comes! Pray don't look so gloomy! seem to be reading the paper,—you can do it obstinately enough when nobody wants you. Here she is!—Any news, Lady Fitzhauton?"

CHAPTER VI.

It rarely happens that the breaker of a matrimonial tête-à-tête is regarded as an unpleasant intruder. It is indeed almost astonishing how two persons who, perhaps, a few months before, exhausted all their ingenuity to contrive opportunities of being alone together, are no sooner at liberty to be so as long as they please than they take every possible means to deprive themselves of the privilege. We say "almost;" for, after all, there is nothing really surprising, since lovers seem to hunt their game as fox-hunters do theirs, for the pleasure of the chace, and not the worth of the spoil.

"Billing and cooing! billing and cooing!

what a happy couple you are! It is really quite refreshing to light on such an oasis of love in the desert of matrimony! Dear Lady Fitzhauton, how are you?" were Mrs. Sparkleton's words as she entered, evidently in a high flow of her invariably brilliant spirits—in society.

There really was no visible reason why Mrs. Sparkleton should conclude the happy pair were engaged in so dove-like an operation. On the contrary, a woman of her intelligence and experience must have been perfectly well aware that something not unlike the reverse of her supposition was the case. But she chose to say so, with a playful glance at the husband, while she kissed the flushed and angry cheek of the wife with the utmost feminine cordiality.

"Oh, no! we were not billing and cooing—we have got all that over this immeasurable time," said Fitzhauton, with an expression of eager pleasure mantling over his handsome face, his eyes sparkling, and his whole manner changed, as if by magic:

"Lady Fitzhauton was reading me some stuff out of the papers; but I really forget what it was about. What was it, *ma chère?*"

Lady Fitzhauton detested to be addressed by any French term of endearment whatever, and so she had repeatedly told her husband. But he had so often heard Mrs. Sparkleton ridicule, in the most felicitous manner, the foolish terms of marital tenderness at one time usual among the uncultivated people of this country, in addressing one another, that he did not care to venture on any in her presence. "My dear," and "My love," and other such antiquated, Vicar-of-Wakefield gallantries are now happily changed into the very coldest forms of expression which absolute strangers could invent for each other's use. The thing is not so bad in French. We are not laying down a canon, but we believe a man may still address his wife with an endearing appellation, provided it is in a foreign language.

"I don't remember," replied Lady Fitzhauton, coldly; and taking up the paper she added, "Oh, it was about the great cow-cabbage in Covent Garden. They say, there never was so large a one seen since they began to grow them. Mamma tried to grow one at Putney, but she watered it too much, and it died—papa said, like an alderman, of repletion."

A significant smile played over Mrs. Sparkleton's lips, while the Earl bit his with vexation.

"I hope that is not the usual fate of aldermen—your father is one, I believe?— Oh, yes, Alderman Gullibull," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "He ought to take great care; he has rather a short neck, I believe, and people say that is not a sign of a long life— and his is so valuable to every one at present! What should I do about my railway things if we lost him? I should not know half so much as the man in the moon, I do believe—in fact that great lunatic may be like the rest of us, and deeper in these

transactions than most people imagine. Truce to business! I came to beg your company, Lady Fitzhauton, to go with me and Lord Deville, to the Flower Show at Chiswick. What say you?"

"I should like extremely—but I had almost given it up, because Lord Fitzhauton says he can't be 'bored' to go with me!—He is not so fond of gallanting me about as he used to be, I suppose, else he used not to consider it a 'bore' to go with me anywhere!" said the young wife, pettishly.

"What, is he turned regular husband at last?" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, turning her laughing, roguish eyes on the culprit, with no great expression of moral blame in them.

"If a *regular* husband is a very *irregular* one"—began the spoiled child of the house of Gullibull, who had been reared to follow her own promptings and inclinations in everything—when the Earl very seasonably cut her short.

"Pray don't annoy Mrs. Sparkleton with

a recital of your domestic grievances, which amount to a regular charge of cruelty, in your absurd way of telling the most trifling occurrences! The truth is, I happened to be out a little late last night, and forgot to tell her—I forgot to tell Lady Fitzhauton, that I was going to a party where I should most likely be detained. Some men of my old corps got together, that is all! I suppose, if I had been at the house, listening to some drowsy old fellow humming and ha-ing over the state of the nation till one had cracked one's jaws with yawning, she would never have noticed one's absence!"

"Well!—Then I suppose you will not notice mine either if I go with Lord Deville and Mrs. Sparkleton to the Flower Show?"

"But, really, will *you* not go? Why will you not go with *us*?" interposed the latter lady, with a slight but irresistibly pleading emphasis on the last word.

"Indeed, I don't see why I am to be specially excluded from the party!" replied

his lordship, with the just indignation of an injured man.

"Why, you said yesterday that you would not go—that you had most particular business this morning!"

"And so I had!—I want to try my new horse, and Tattersall's man will be here with it in a minute or two," said Fitzhauton, somewhat taken aback. "But there is nothing so ridiculous as a husband dangling perpetually after his wife. It looks as if he were jealous, and I don't want to get up a reputation for being a white Othello—as Deville says."

"So, you are obstinately bent on not making one in this innocent little party?—and you have never seen my carnations since they came to their full bloom!" said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"No; I almost entreated him, but he could not hear of deferring his appointment with his horse and groom!" said Lady Fitzhauton, with angry vivacity.

"Shall we plead in vain against these

powerful rivals? Well, one don't certainly expect a man to be a bridegroom always—but one might show a little civility to a stranger damsel!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, in her most winningly playful manner. "Now, Lord Fitzhauton, in the name of all your chivalric grandfathers, I demand, can you refuse two weeping ladies such a boon?"

"Well, but . . . I am only to have a week's trial of the mare . . . and this is such a fine day for it," replied his lordship, quite irresolutely—not from much fear or care of displeasing his wife, though he had a vague sense that she would not be exactly pleased to find another successful where she had so signally failed. But he had always been accustomed to do what pleased himself best, and, at the moment, it was doubtful to his own choice which he would prefer—to try his beautiful new mare in Rotten Row, or to spend a few hours in an equally amusing flirtation with Mrs. Sparkleton. Suddenly an excellent thought occurred to him, a masterpiece of invention, which

conciliated every objection and every object.

"Oh, I know how I'll manage it now, my fair suppliants!" he exclaimed. "I'll ride Roan Bess to Chiswick, and join you in the gardens. That's capital! There will be lots of fellows there to look at her; and I shan't get very dusty; or, if I do, Mrs. Sparkleton at least, I know, will not cut an old friend for looking a little shabby!"

He was leaning against the mantel-piece as he spoke, and looked down with a smile which vexed Lady Fitzhauton excessively, while it rather raised Mrs. Sparkleton's colour, and certainly added greatly to the vivacious lustre of her fine eyes.

"But I shall not need such an ungallant beau as you appear to make—Lord Deville will be there," she, however, replied carelessly. "At present, don't let me hinder your lordship from pursuing your own inclinations; and I can amuse myself with the news while Lady Fitzhauton dresses for our drive."

"I think there is no time to lose, then, Annie; for you are pretty late already. Is Deville to call for you here?" replied the Earl, looking at his watch.

"I expect him every moment—pray don't let me keep either of you from the important business in hand," said Mrs. Sparkleton, drawing two or three papers towards her. "I have seen nothing this morning, not even my darling share-market, which I do not understand the least in the world—except that everything is going up to the skies! Where is it? Those dear Yorks? .... 'Magnificent fête' .... 'Distress of the Spitalfields weavers'.... 'Wore a carcanet of the purest diamonds'.... 'Death from want'..... Dear me, where can it be? 'We deeply regret to announce the death of the Rt. Honour.' .... 'Lady Dazzle wore a dress of silver gauze over satin *bleu de ciel*' (that was pretty, too) .... 'To the worthy, free, and independent electors of' .... 'Wanted a place'.... Oh, here it is. And

now I can amuse myself for an hour without the smallest assistance."

"I wonder when that fellow will come with the mare?" said Lord Fitzhauton, walking discontentedly to the window.

"Well, I'll go. I shall not be ten minutes," said his wife, who, somehow or another, in spite of her own wish and will, felt herself compelled to take the opportunity thus afforded her, or remain to exhibit a ridiculous sentiment of jealousy which she was too haughty to acknowledge even to her own consciousness; and, therefore, with a heart swelling full of secret indignation, she withdrew to her dressing-room, where she purposely prolonged her toilette, to show how entirely free from apprehension, or care, she was on the subject.

In fact, if the two parties left behind had stated what they veritably considered, at the time, to be their own motives and intentions, Lady Fitzhauton had very slight reason to trouble herself on their score.

The Earl wished to be amused, and Mrs. Sparkleton was a very amusing woman. He did not see that because he had married a plebeian, he was to be debarred from intercourse with society of his own rank—and Mrs. Sparkleton was universally acknowledged to be one of its most brilliant ornaments. If his wife had been a spoiled child, it did not follow that he was to humour her foolish whims and fancies in the absurd style of her doting parents. And was he to sacrifice all his own inclinations and pleasures to hers, because she had happened to have a little money when he married her? Had she bought him as a slave? He felt indignant and injured at the bare idea—and returned to his old stand opposite Mrs. Sparkleton.

And what were Mrs. Sparkleton's intents or purposes? Perfectly harmless. She might, perhaps, not dislike to show a degree of power over a handsome and haughty man. What woman would? She might not, in her heart of hearts, be without some

feeling of satisfaction at the secret mortification thereby inflicted on the plebeian wife who had usurped—but, no, the sacred rights of money prevented even Mrs. Sparkleton from deeming herself so much injured by the preference as to use such a word or such an idea. Still it was extremely disagreeable to Mrs. Sparkleton to remember that she had been a widow nearly six months when Lord Fitzhauton married Miss Gullibull. Since that event she had, perhaps, taken a pleasure in being always more particularly brilliant and showy in company when he and his bride were present, and in displaying to what advantage she might, the contrast of her own high-bred manners and accomplishments with the injudicious imitations, or still more injudicious defiances, of the parvenu peeress.

Yet no woman could say kinder things of another than Mrs. Sparkleton frequently did of Lady Fitzhauton—especially when she thought they would be repeated. Even on this occasion, Lord Fitzhauton observed

with a smile, as he returned to his station, "Well, I suppose I had better be off, since you are so busy with your politics—or business, is it? By-the-by, Mrs. Sparkleton, how long is it since you have been in trade?"

"Oh, Alderman Gullibull has transformed me into a shareholder—a regular woman on 'Change, as he called me the other day, in his delightfully brusque manner. Nay, I don't despair yet to see your lordship's most noble Norman name mixed up among our doings. Fitzhauton, Gullibull, and Co.—how would that sound?—But what a sly creature you are! Who would have thought, when you made your unaccountable disappearance from society, that you were diving into the ocean to bring up this pearl?"

"Did people miss me much, then?" said his lordship, smiling, but inwardly nettled. "But it's quite as unaccountable that they don't bring my horse. I think I'll just stroll down to the place myself."

"Pray, my lord, don't let me frighten

you away," returned Mrs. Sparkleton, laughingly.

"Oh, no; charming Mrs. Sparkleton is not the woman to frighten any man!" said the gallant peer.

"At all events, you were not always so timid, as to run away the moment you saw me!" replied the lady.

"I had not always so much reason. For Time, like an exquisite painter, does but add new charms to you at every touch!"

"I wish he would let me alone, however," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "But really, Lord Fitzhauton, it almost seems to me of late as if you took pains to avoid me. What is the matter? Have I offended you?"

"Offended me? Impossible! It is my fear of offending you, dear Mrs. Sparkleton, if anything. For now that I am married, the expression of my admiration—of an admiration shared by all the world—might not be so proper as——"

"When I had a husband living to share

the honour which it conferred upon me?" interrupted the lady, with some little vivacity. "But all that is past. Let us forget our nonsensical—I don't know what to call it—at Paris. Henceforth, of course—in fact, we never were anything but very good friends; and so let us continue. One easily forgets stuff of that sort, you know."

"You did not speak with such indifference—you really did not," said the Earl, pettishly, "when you were pleased to fancy your reputation in danger, because the Colonel began grumbling about nothing—fancied he was jealous because he had the gout; when you forced me to fly to England!"

"I did not know that you were flying to England to get married; and people cannot help doing or saying stupid things at times. It is not in human nature."

"Nor did I, upon my honour. But really, how could I help it? I was head over ears in debt; and they even tried to catch me at Dover, the moment I landed,

to endeavour to arrange things. I met the Gullibulls there first—no, it was in the packet—they were coming over too."

"Yes; that was Mrs. Gullibull's famous *Paury* trip, was it not? But pray don't make any apology to me for such an inevitable thing as matrimony.—It was altogether nonsense, and as such one ought to think of it; or do you believe I should take such a pleasure as I do in coming to this house?"

"And, besides, you have another affair on the tapis, at present. Everybody says that Deville is to be the happy man!" said Lord Fitzhauton, rather bitterly, considering that he spoke of his own intimate friend. At all events, one that had a right to the designation, inasmuch as they frequently played at billiards and drank champagne together, gave one another dinners, and sometimes went to an important debate, arm-in-arm, whenever Lord Deville particularly desired to secure a vote.

"Do they?—Well, everybody seems to

know one's affairs better than oneself, and indeed they well may, mine," said Mrs. Sparkleton, carelessly. "But what an immense time Lady Fitzhauton takes to dress herself! She might have put on as many costumes as a Turkish bride in this space—and, there, I think I see your horse passing the window."

"You want to be rid of me,—but I'll not go till you tell me that—that we are as good friends as ever!"

"Of course we are. Whatever could make you imagine to the contrary?"

"I must have your hand upon it then. This is almost the first opportunity I have had of mentioning how sorry I was that—you must be perfectly aware—I have not the smallest doubt—I really almost think sometimes that you quite feel for me?"

"Well, I own I am a little sorry at times, when I see how vexed you are at the queer behaviour of your new relations. But, then, they don't know better!—How can people that have been brought up all

their lives in the city—I mean, how is it possible one can understand this money market stuff, when they put the accounts in those incomprehensible fractions and units of theirs?"

The latter part of this speech may not seem to the reader to have much connexion with the former part; but it was, in reality, a dexterous break and turn which Mrs. Sparkleton's politeness suggested, for the door opened at this moment, and admitted Lady Fitzhauton, in complete array.

"What! are you not gone yet? I thought you were in such a hurry! It is really a very handsome compliment to you, Mrs. Sparkleton, for he never hardly stops for any one, if he wants to go anywhere himself," said Lady Fitzhauton. "But now, I suppose, I may relieve guard? Your new favourite has been at the door this half-hour."

Lord Fitzhauton was not sorry for an opportunity to escape an uncomfortable trio. His vanity was soothed, for he imagined he

had detected signs of more pique in Mrs. Sparkleton than she usually permitted herself to display. He did not like that any woman, whom he had once honoured with his attentions, should become indifferent to them; and he satisfied his conscience with assurances that his only object in bringing about an explanation, which had much better never have been made, was to place their future intercourse on the most clear and harmless basis of friendly sentiment.

Perhaps if this young nobleman had been educated on less decided principles of selfishness, he would have thought it advisable to stay where he was, to spare Mrs. Sparkleton a *tête-à-tête*, which he must have felt was disagreeable to her. But Roan Bess was pawing the ground in fiery spirits before the door, with every prospect of a delightful ride, and a grand show-off. Accordingly he bade them a good morning—declared he should be at Chiswick an hour before them—and made his exit.

Wonderful! No sooner had the doors

closed on their right honourable master, than Mrs. Sparkleton turned to chat in the most cordial manner in the world with Lady Fitzhauton. That lady herself lost a good deal of her school-girl pettishness and asperity almost simultaneously. If two dogs are contending for a bone, they snarl and bite at each other without mercy; but let it suddenly be withdrawn by some adventurous bystander, and they either both turn upon him, or altogether relinquish the useless feud. We are not likening our heroines, of course, to such quadrupeds; but we make it a point not to sacrifice any comparison, however remote, which comes into our head; for though comparisons are proverbially odious, they generally throw some light on their correlatives.

To say truth, Mrs. Sparkleton had not sufficient respect for Lady Fitzhauton to dislike her to any tragical excess. It is more difficult to despise and hate than to despise and love a person at the same time. Mrs. Sparkleton thought that her ladyship

was a foolish, petulant, arrogant, purse-proud school-girl of a parvenue; and she only disliked her very much without thinking that she did so at all. There was a brilliancy, a dash, a supremacy about Mrs. Sparkleton, which induced the said parvenue on her part—whenever she did not instinctively feel that those fascinating displays were working to her own detriment—to regard her with sentiments of admiration, perhaps of awe.

CHAPTER VII.

"LORD FITZHAUTON used to be a great horseman at Paris—the French admired him wonderfully," said Mrs. Sparkleton, quietly watching him as he rode off on his splendid steed.

"He had sold off all his horses when we knew him first; and he was just come from Paris then," replied Lady Fitzhauton, rather drily; "I don't know what he might have there, but he had none in England—I know that very well."

"She is thinking of her money again!" thought Mrs. Sparkleton, scornfully. "Pounds, shillings, and pence!—her mind is made of them. She is think-

ing how she paid his debts, as if other people—but of course I had not so much ready money by me at the time. Perhaps the Colonel was *not* dead when he began courting her!—and I could not have raised so much money if I had beggared myself. If he had waited, now, till these railways came on!"

We would not mislead the reader on any point, however trivial. Notwithstanding the generous rumination which we have put on record, we are not at all certain that our rich young widow of quality would have jumped at the chance of paying Lord Fitzhauton's debts so readily as the Gullibulls appeared to have done.

Mrs. Sparkleton was, however, rather in the humour to make herself agreeable to her companion. She had observed that Lady Fitzhauton had begun to take the alarm at her evident coquetry with her husband; and it was very far, indeed, from Mrs. Sparkleton's intentions to come to an open rupture, or to compromise herself in

any manner in such an affair. She could not live without visiting-cards—that was her morality. A flirtation, begun in vanity and continued in pique, was all she permitted herself to think had ever been or could possibly result.

The parvenu peeress delighted in a kind of information in which Mrs. Sparkleton abounded—in anecdotes of the private life and demeanour of the starry class into which the poor girl at times imagined she had intruded, like some creature of an altogether alien sphere. But these anecdotes, replete with scandal, true or false, with ridicule, or with satire of the most keen-cutting brilliancy — in all which Mrs. Sparkleton was an accomplished mistress—were gradually awakening her to more consoling, if less respectful; convictions. Once at work, Mrs. Sparkleton spared little, high or low; but on this occasion it pleased her to exercise her lively talents altogether on people whom she knew were disliked by Lady Fitzhauton.

Perhaps, in secret, she would have been glad to be released by Lord Deville's arrival, even from this congenial task. The listener was not sufficiently acquainted with personages and events, to suit the impatient and glancing style of Mrs. Sparkleton's satirical wit. She had to explain too much, and felt encumbered, like a book with notes. The point of half her anecdotes was lost, from the unfortunate innocence of Lady Fitzhauton in bygones and antecedents. How could she, who had never seen the great Marchioness, and who had only an awful idea of her from report, understand the infinite glee with which her informant related "the story of the physician," as it was called at the time it was all the rage of the F. circle?

"She ought to have invited you to her ball. I was astonished not to see you there. Lord Fitzhauton used always to be invited until he got out of the market," she rattled on. "I will tell you a story about her, to diminish your regret; though you have no

occasion for any, for her balls are mere mobs, where one goes to be suffocated by fine people. I have an idea that it's just as pleasant to go to a theatre, on a state visit. She was at some watering-place or another (I *won't* remember the exact one) the other day,—for she is always ill, poor soul, though there is nothing at all the matter with her! But they have a dreadful savage of a physician where she was—a man that is always speaking truth—and you know what sort of people they are. People only pretend to be honest that they may vent their malice and be praised for it. However, she went to consult him, and described the symptoms of her disorder in the most moving terms. I believe she has all that are known to physicians, or at least that one can pronounce without having had an university education. But he listened as if it had all been about nothing—which it was—that is to say, he scarcely listened at all; and I am not certain whether he did not go on reading a book while she talked at him. Oh, no! I

suppose he did not quite do that; but—— you know what a haughty personage—what an empress of a Marchioness—it is! She flew into a passion at not being treated with the respect due to her,—meaning, of course, the awe-stricken homage of a slave to the Grand Sultana. He answered like the Grand Turk himself; and then she furiously demanded if he knew whom he was speaking to? 'Yes; to a little old woman with a stomach-ache!' Think of such a reply to a lady who still considers herself a beauty, the queen of fashion, and ill of all the maladies incidental to humanity, in the most interesting degree?"

Lady Fitzhauton laughed heartily: but what was that tribute compared with the quiet smiles of a properly seasoned group of the initiated?

The wit of another little legend, which consisted in a most accurate imitation of "dear, sweet Mrs. Semple's lovely lisp," altogether escaped her. Mrs. Semple had lost a pearl necklace at the opera, and it

was brought to her by a Captain somebody, who gave an account of her manner of receiving it and thanking him. Oh! that wonderful "Ye-th" of Mrs. Sparkleton! how it told the story, and a dozen others in the same breath, in the indescribable listlessness and powerlessness of character she managed to infuse into it.

But she spared no one. A servant announced the "Honourable Miss Scurmucheon" in the midst of this diverting gossip; and between the interval of the announcement and entrance, Mrs. Sparkleton had thus satisfactorily analysed the visiter's component parts.

"At home! I wonder you can be to that dreadful old woman. She is as mischievous as she is withered—and withered as a witch. Dry and skinny as a stuffed viper; only she still keeps *her* poison. She is the severest of censors; yet I am sure not a bit better than she should be herself."

"But she is Lord Fitzhauton's aunt!"

"I know she is; and to be sure you must be polite to one another's relatives."

"I know what she would like, but what she never shall do,—to come and live with us, and make me wretched from morning till night," said Lady Fitzhamton, greatly encouraged: "although she pretends to be so kind and charitable."

"Full of the milk of human kindness turned *sour*," interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton. She had private and pretty bitter reasons of dislike against the lady in review, who set herself up for a model of propriety, and had probably done as much as anybody, or anything, to induce her noble nephew to withdraw from the perilous society of the wife of Colonel Sparkleton. "She pretends to be charitable because she gives her chicken-bones to make broth for the poor; religious, because she is not found out at cards, and goes to church twice a-week; benevolent, because she does all her mischief under pretence of doing good, and begs for charities

what keeps her an opera box and pew. She is the most dreadful old maid I ever heard of or imagined, and I would give the world if Lord Deville had come before she did."

At the conclusion of this speech the door opened, and admitted the proprietress of the characteristics indicated—who was received in a very different manner from what one would have expected such a personage would have been. Lady Fitzhauton arose, and with considerable tremulousness—colouring like a school-girl detected in some breach of discipline by the severest of the governesses —went to meet her. Mrs. Sparkleton smiled politely, and nodded,—and made way with flattering attention, to enable Miss Scurmucheon to take a seat in an arm-chair, to which Lady Fitzhauton escorted her, after submitting to the preliminary operation of a kiss—a kiss as dry and crusty as a fir-apple pressed to the lips.

The Honourable Miss Scurmucheon had indeed no very exuberant warmth of tenderness for her parvenu niece. She was ex-

cessively proud of the high rank and lineage of her family, which she always remembered with satisfaction during a now rather long period of single blessedness. She had sacrificed her only chance of matrimony, and the affections of an estimable young man, the only one who had ever offered at the shrine those rare, though often simulated gifts. Miss Scurmucheon had followed the advice of her distinguished parents, in early youth, who detected their pauper chaplain, sprig of some tradesman's family, to be in love with their daughter, and commanded her to discard him at once, and for ever. She obeyed. The pauper chaplain was now a bishop: Miss Scurmucheon was still Miss Scurmucheon. But the circumstance had endeared her noble blood to her; doubtless on the principle that the more you give for a thing the more it is worth.

To such a lady the marriage of her nephew, the heir of all the family honours, to what she called "a tallow-merchant's daughter," was indeed a bitter pill. But

she was obliged to swallow it. Her lofty sire had not seemed to think that rich blood required much feeding to keep it at the proper purple. He left her a very small competence indeed, and avariciously and skilfully as she had managed it, it was so far from adequate to her wants, that she felt obliged to consent to any measure likely to restore the fortunes of her nephew, which, in one shape or another, she had contrived hitherto to partake.

Besides, as "lowliness is young ambition's ladder," she found in Miss Gullibull, at the commencement of their acquaintance, such an attractive amiableness, and submission of manner, that she had no doubt they should agree admirably together. A girl so inexperienced, and in fact ignorant, of all that is thought worth knowing westward of Charing Cross, could not but rejoice in the opportunities which Miss Scurmucheon was determined to afford her, of acquiring necessary information under her own constant supervision. She had

little doubt that she should be invited to take up her permanent residence in her new niece's house—which would have been more convenient than paying a high rent for bad lodgings in a back street of Mayfair. But she was disappointed. Mrs. Gullibull, mother, though a fool in almost everything that concerned the intercourse of her family with the great world, was wide-awake on this one point. She said, it would be worse than having a stepmother in the house—and she remembered, with no very pleasing associations, the infinite plague and sorrow she had endured from her own, till she condescended to die—for the Alderman would never hear of his mother being turned out of doors, however pleasingly the process was depicted, as being only "putting your poor dear old mother where she can be better attended to, and enjoy the country air." The old woman was suffered to live and die, and annoy everybody in the house, to the day of her death, by the honest man, her son, who on this point would not "listen to reason."

But this experience enabled Mrs. Gullibull to preserve her daughter from a great snare and delusion. Besides, she had a personal and very deep dislike to Miss Scurmucheon, for which the reader can readily account; when he remembers the forced relationship in which the poor aristocrat and the rich parvenue stood towards each other. And therefore Miss Scurmucheon still continued to pay a yearly stipend for lodgings not near so convenient and airy as those enjoyed, gratis, by her nephew's horses—an injury not easily forgiven. But even her influence in other respects had been rapidly on the wane since Mrs. Sparkleton appeared on the Fitzhauton horizon. Mrs. Gullibull absolutely doated on the latter lady, whom she looked upon as the model of all that was gay, brilliant, aristocratic, and fashionable among created things.

Miss Scurmucheon had nothing particularly unprepossessing in her exterior to account for aversion, on any other principles. She was a good height—rather

lean, certainly; with large front teeth projecting too much from her mouth, and no back ones—a circumstance perhaps a little too visible when she drew too wide a smile. But she had good eyes—that is to say, sharp and grey, and a long, straight nose; and hair even too black, so well did it keep its raven hues beneath the frost of time. Mrs. Sparkleton, indeed, insisted that it was dyed; but we place very little faith in what she said of enemies. No one, however, could deny that Miss Scurmucheon had an excellent figure, and she was dressed as if she thought so herself. No new pin ever started resplendent from the maker's pincers, that could equal her in neatness and finish. Lavender satin gown, lavender boots, (laced as if by conscience, and as a religious duty), lavender shawl, lavender bonnet, lavender gloves — all of different but most delicately harmonized hues, denoted to the world the truly Christian state of Miss Scurmucheon's mind; how she abhorred show, and eschewed vanities. No—there

was nothing vain about her but her eye-glass; which was not her fault either—it had been left her, with its splendid chain, by a "dear, departed friend."

Cordial greetings were exchanged, as we have said, and the ladies resumed, or took seats. Let us now do justice to Miss Scurmucheon's magnanimity, or Christian humility and forgiving meekness, for we know not which it was. The utmost she had ever done against Mrs. Sparkleton with her niece was, to drop little intangible insinuations, of a kind impossible to be put into any shape that might give offence to her beloved nephew. Nor, if she had really been animated by the most friendly spirit towards the lady, could she have treated her with more marked civility. But as she had just come from a religious meeting at Exeter Hall, no doubt she was still under the influence of the charitable polemics disseminated within the walls of that enclosure.

"This is quite an unexpected pleasure,

Mrs. Sparkleton; it is really quite a long time since I have seen you. How long is it?—let me see," observed Miss Scurmucheon.

"It is not worth calculating—but it is some time now. It is not my fault, however. But you are growing quite a recluse. You don't come so much even here, where everybody is so glad to see you, as you used, I believe?"

"Lady Fitzhauton is so often out, that one can hardly ever catch her at home," replied Miss Scurmucheon, good-humouredly. "You are quite spoiling her, Mrs. Sparkleton. I shall really take Charles to task for giving her over so absolutely to your guidance. I fear you are neither of you sufficiently impressed with the great truths of——"

"There is nothing so disagreeable as great truths—horrible bores. I own I cut them wherever I meet with them," interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton. "But how is your dear parrot, Miss Scurmucheon? How

amusing it must be to you, who have nothing to tease you—neither husband, child, nor jointure—to teach it how to scream—I mean, to talk!"

"Quite delightful. But I am unteaching it everything at present. It was given me by some very low people, and they——"

"Why, mamma gave it you!" interrupted Lady Fitzhauton.

"What I meant to say is, that while it was in the hands of the sailors belonging to your kind papa's ship, it acquired some vulgar habits, my dear, which I spend a great deal of time in eradicating. I am trying if these things cannot learn good things as well as bad; whether their beaks cannot utter thanksgivings as well as blasphemies! I beat it with a stick I have on purpose as often as it utters any of those dreadful words."

"Poor Poll! it is not its fault; it did not make itself," observed Lady Fitzhauton, in a low tone.

"You might as well say," returned Miss

Scurmucheon, in the true theological sharps "you might as well say of a wicked man or woman, 'Poor things! they are not to blame! they did not make themselves!' instead of punishing them here and hereafter!"

"I am sure I would not, at least not in both places," observed Mrs. Sparkleton.

"One can't of course say, in this instance, that a fellow-feeling 'makes one wondrous kind;' but I am surprised to hear such observations from any Christian lips," returned Miss Scurmucheon, who had suddenly mounted her great horse. "Unless we believe in the saving truths of Christianity——"

"But these are not 'saving truths,' Miss Scurmucheon!" said Mrs. Sparkleton. "If I were not afraid to offend in the same manner as your unhappy parrot, I would tell you what kind of truths they are! Just the reverse of 'saving,' I should think."

"You are incorrigible, Mrs. Sparkleton! I am sorry to think it, but really the Colonel —the Colonel must have tainted you with

his latitudinarian principles. As the Rev. Mr. Damnall justly observed this morning, 'It is not the Trinitarians nor the Anti-Trinitarians, nor any other-arians that I am afraid of so much—so much, ladies and gentlemen, as of the *indifferentarians!*' It is not the fury of the sea, of the angry winds, of the—the—, he went through a whole string of things that it was *not;* but he ended by saying, 'we have the dry rot of indifference among us, which is infinitely worse than any or all!'"

"It is better than roasting and broiling one another, however: does he want us to go back to those merry old times of yore?" retorted Mrs. Sparkleton.

"He wants—but I'll let you see—I am one of the treasurers and collectors for the charity," said Miss Scurmucheon, eagerly producing her pocket-book.

"What a time Lord Deville is! If it were not that people might think it odd, I would really run to the club and remind him of his engagement," said Mrs. Sparkleton,

yawning slightly. "But I'll defy you to tax my sensibilities this morning, Miss Scurmucheon; for I am turned as hard as a rock, and think of nothing but how to make money.—Thank goodness! there he is."

"Who?" said Miss Scurmucheon; "Lord Deville? Well, I do rather like that man, though he is so shockingly irreligious: he is a brand worth taking from the burning, were it only for your sake, dear Mrs. Sparkleton."

"For my sake! how for mine?" returned that lady, with vivacity. Mrs. Sparkleton was content that a vague report should assign her this brilliant conquest; but, considering the real state of things, she was determined that no one should have it in his, or rather in her, power, to represent the affair, on authority, in a light which might prove disadvantageous to herself. To use a turf simile, she would not enter a horse which she thought so very likely to be distanced.

"Oh, everybody says—and you know

what everybody says must be true—that there is something more than mere friendship between you. And I own, although your manners are so charmingly engaging and versatile to everybody—hi, hi, hi!—I cannot help thinking so myself!" said Miss Scurmucheon.

"Nonsense! it is all pure invention; but one can't help people's envious chatter."

"I hope not, for *your* sake, my dear! for when one's name gets mixed up with a man's—" said Miss Scurmucheon, with malignant sedateness of innuendo not lost on Mrs. Sparkleton, who coloured, and was about to make some reply which might have provoked farther discussion, when the door opened, and admitted the personage whose announcement had originally provoked it.

CHAPTER VIII.

"GOOD MORROW, beauty's rosebud! as an Oriental might say; good morrow, fair ladies," said the Viscount, smilingly, as he entered. Lady Fitzhauton looked fluttered but pleased, and Miss Scurmucheon herself bridled up with a very fascinating expression of welcome. There really was not such a very great disparity of years between fifty and forty-five, though the majority was on the lady's side, to make a nobleman like Lord Deville an object altogether of indifference to Miss Scurmucheon.

"Now everybody says I am a brunette, and therefore not a fair lady," she replied, roguishly and playfully.

"Well, but at least you are so at cards," said his lordship. "However, I will take the hint when I write sonnets, and call you my nut-brown maid. But I have to apologise, Mrs. Sparkleton, for——"

"You come just in time, my lord," interrupted Miss Scrimmuchcon, "I want you to subscribe to a——"

"Charity in Kamschatka?" interrupted his lordship, in turn. "Well, put me down a chaldron."

"No, *nearer home*," said Mrs. Sparkleton, with great significance.

"Are we going to insult the poor of some parish with an ounce of bad mutton a-piece?"

"Oh dear no, poor things! It is not their temporal welfare that is of any real consequence," said the charitable emissary of the Rev. Mr. Damnall, opening her pocket-book. "But is it true, as every one says, Lord Deville, that you have survived your old prejudices against matrimony, and intend shortly to enter the holy state?"

"I must then have turned the cheek, for marriage has been my greatest enemy," replied Deville, with a glance at Lady Fitzhauton, which seemed to disturb, and perhaps vex her, tender and submissive as was its expression.

"You are in love, at all events, they tell me?" persisted Miss Scurmucheon.

"But without hope, love is a lamp without oil," replied the feeling Viscount.

"It will soon go out, then, that is one consolation," observed Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Oh, no; my soul is the oil, and it will feed the flame till it expires—I mean, till it goes out of the body, Miss Scurmucheon; so don't look a sermon at me."

"Well, well, since you are all so pathetic, I will turn your feelings into something substantial," said the skilful missionary. "It is for some people, who ——"

"For the poor man who was found dead in a cellar yesterday?" said Lord Deville. "Ah, Miss Scurmucheon, we hear of nothing but your charities; 'tis of no use to deny it.

Your footsteps, like an angel's, leave light behind to track you. It was you that sent the poor starved creature a loaf. I know it, for your footman brought it in before all the jury, and handed it to the reporter."

"Yes, poor creature! I intended to have sent him a blanket, too, only my list was full; and it is quite as well, as it turned out. What was the verdict?" said Miss Scurmucheon, in a most compassionate tone.

"Oh, natural death, of course! What can be more natural than to die when one has nothing to eat?" replied Lord Deville. "And it is astonishing how many people would have saved him when he was dead! He might have a coffin like a prince.—But have you prevailed on Lady Fitzhauton, Mrs. Sparkleton?"

"Oh, yes! Lady Fitzhauton goes; and we are wasting all the fine of the day talking nonsense here!" exclaimed Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Nonsense—do you call it nonsense,

madam! when so many people are absolutely starving for the light of the gospel? and the object of this appeal is to disseminate over all Ireland those truths without which man may indeed live and breathe, but to his own eternal loss and destruction," said Miss Scurmuchcon, with vivid indignation.

"If there be any truth, without which a man may live and breathe in Ireland, pray don't try and introduce it!" exclaimed Lord Deville. "But I cannot think there is. I see in this morning's paper that they are eating seaweed, with very good appetite, all along Rackrent county coast."

"The very place! We are going to send as many Bibles as there are cottages among them; and I want you all to subscribe. There is not a sturdier beggar in the whole world than I am, for the poor."

"If I subscribed anything, it should be potatoes and bread," said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Their spiritual destitution is far greater,

I assure you, than their corporeal one, though, I admit, that is great enough; but who can ever wish the hand of the Lord to be stayed over people so obstinately popish?" continued Miss Scurmucheon, eloquently. "Oh, if you would but come next Sunday, and hear the Rev. Mr. Damnall preach!"

"I am not to be frightened out of my money," interrupted Mrs Sparkleton, "unless with a pistol, or something substantial of that sort. Besides, I should never think of troubling you with my subscription, when one can so easily send it one's self."

"It is no trouble to me—I am treasurer to I don't know how many subscriptions," said Miss Scurmucheon, taking her pencil in hand. "What shall I put you all down?"

"I'll pay mine at once, and be rid of it!" said Lady Fitzhauton, drawing out her purse. "How much will do—what's the highest subscription?"

"As yet, my dear?" replied the affectionate aunt. "Why, only five pounds!

but, considering your rank, and the well-known wealth of the family, I think we ought to say—you cannot well subscribe less than ten."

"Well, then, you must put me down for that; I may want what I have in my purse," replied the fortune carelessly.

"Now, Mrs. Sparkleton?"

"I tell you, I will only subscribe to fill the poor creatures' stomachs; I don't believe their minds can be in a good state to receive religious impressions while they are so hungry," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "Lord Deville, will you join with me, and we will send our subscription to the clergyman of the place?"

"With pleasure!"

"But there is no clergyman!" said Miss Scurmucheon, in an irritated tone. "He has a deanery somewhere in England, and don't live there."

"Well, well, but surely there's a curate?"

"Oh, no, it's a Catholic place; no curate—Catholic, I am sorry to say."

"Well, then, the Catholic clergyman."

"The Catholic clergyman!—the popish minister of Satan!" exclaimed Miss Scurmucheon, in indescribable horror, gazing incredulously at the speaker.

"If their souls are worth saving, so are their bodies, I should think; at least, I know nothing in Scripture to the contrary, though I am not very deep in theology," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "Lord Deville may do as he pleases, of course; but if I don't forget it, I shall do as I have said."

"And I will trim between both opinions, like a true politician of the new school, and do as both ladies command me—five pounds for the souls, and five pounds for the bodies of the poor folk of Rackrent county!" said Lord Deville. "And now, ladies, unless we mean to arrive in the dusk of the evening, at the Flower Show ——"

But this peace-making address was cut short by one of the most terrific rat-tat-tats that ever shook a house to its foundations with the announcement of some visiter,

whose importance justifies his footmen in stunning the ears of a neighbourhood.

"Oh, that's mamma!" exclaimed Lady Fitzhauton, with almost the first sincere and natural expression of feeling she had indulged in all the morning. And she inwardly thought, "Now there's a match for you all coming!" with the feelings of a fagged sentinel who hears the relief approach.

But Mrs. Gullibull was too perfect a mistress of manners, as taught in all the little pamphlets on etiquette, to omit any point of ceremony. She sent up her card to know if her ladyship was at home, though she had already the consolatory assurance that she was, and followed it herself as fast as she could come. That certainly was not at a railroad speed, for Mrs. Gullibull was very fat, and heavily laden with velvet and ornaments. They heard her panting up the stairs; for she took no notice of the footman's polite invitation to enter the breakfast parlour, where she would find the object of her visit. "Come along,

Charity; come along, Miss Green, my love; we'll go to the drawing-room; perhaps her ladyship has visiters, and we might intrude. Lauk-a-mercy, what a broiling day it is!"

"Mamma, I am here; pray, come here, mamma!" said Lady Fitzhauton, presenting herself at the door; and Mrs. Gullibull turned so suddenly that she overthrew a china vase on the staircase, overrun with some scented creeper falling as gracefully as water to the ground.

"Never mind; I'll send you a better one, if it's to be had for love or money," said Mrs. Gullibull, a little discomposed; adding, in a loud whisper, "Is anybody in with you? You can say it is Charity's awkwardness; she is always overthrowing things at home, you know."

The said Miss Green was a tall, pale, nervous-looking girl of about two-and-twenty, whom one would have scarcely expected to find in such fashionable society as Mrs. Gullibull's. She was not at all fashionably dressed; but what she wore was neatly and

carefully arranged, excepting in the article of her gloves. These were of white kid, too small for her hands, which were, alas! a little red and coarse, with rough early uses. But Mrs. Gullibull had insisted she should subdue them to an aristocratic smallness, in these integuments; and they had burst their bounds in two or three places, and showed all the redder for the compression.

The reason for this interest taken by Mrs. Gullibull in the welfare of her companion has perhaps been already guessed by the reader. Charity Green was a poor relation —in fact, the orphan niece of Mrs. Gullibull herself. She had enjoyed this position for now nearly three years, and but for an unaccountable sort of pride, in a person left quite penniless, might have been almost as well dressed as Mrs. Gullibull herself—in her discarded raiment. Often and often had she refused the handsomest offers of this description, and contenting herself with the least possible sum that could answer the purpose, from the bounty of her rich rela-

tions, clad herself with a humble neatness which, in the opinion of nearly all of them, argued a natural meanness and poverty of spirit. Under these circumstances, it was considered very good by the family that she was of a singularly retired and silent temperament. Her whole demeanour was so unobtrusive and quiet that you might be hours in the same room with her and them, and never have noticed she was there. If you did at all, you would have thought she was wonderfully grave for so young a person, and perhaps, if given to the study of physiognomies, you might have imagined you detected an expression of patient suffering, which from the depths of her soul shadowed her seemingly inert and submissive countenance.

Yet was there, at present, apparently but little or no reason for poor Charity Green's sadness, unless it was that, as Mrs. Gullibull often declared, and sometimes thought, she was of a "glum disposition" naturally. While her parents were alive, she had not

been very well off, even for the necessaries of life; the luxuries she had only heard of from report, or from seeing them displayed in the shop windows. Her father was a wonderful sort of a man; he was a proud post-office clerk—one that preferred to live on his eighty pounds a-year, with a wife and child, to begging any favour, however small, of his wife's rich relatives. He was wrong in that; for, although Mrs. Gullibull exacted much deference and homage from those on whom she conferred her favours, she was a woman of a good heart in the main, and anxiously desired to remove the opprobrium of poverty from all in any way connected with her. But this proud post-office clerk, embittered against wealth in the abstract, and of a morose, unbending nature, would have been glad to receive an obligation without acknowledging, or even feeling it to be one; and Mrs. Gullibull was not the woman to confer anything of the kind. Perhaps also Mr. Green considered himself too deeply wronged

in a refusal which he encountered, when he bent his soul, at last, to ask for one of the vacant clerkships in the great corn-merchant's office, ever to hazard another. Mrs. Gullibull could not endure the thought of one of her relatives filling so subordinate a position in sight of the world, and a long estrangement ensued. At last, Mr. Green died of a malady which the doctors of modern times are vainly bending all their science to withstand. It was classed in the weekly bills, under the head of "Affections of the respiratory organs," but in reality, he died of poverty,—low diet, and hopelessness of spirit. His widow struggled for awhile in a small grocer's shop; and, with the assistance of her daughter's needle, they managed to linger on existence, until a compassionate typhus removed the mother also. She had been all her life a hard-working, comfortless drudge; and existence was no great loss to her. The only thing that troubled her much—for her feelings were not very acute on any point—was to

leave her daughter alone and unprotected in the world. She got the apothecary's boy, who attended her, and who lavished all the resources of his skill in pounding medicines —for of compounding he knew nothing— on her case, to write an epistle, at her dictation, recommending her child to the merciful notice of Mrs. Gullbull. It was very feelingly written, for the young disciple of Esculapius imagined he was writing a begging letter to the rich Alderman's wife, had no suspicion of the relationship existing, and was proud of an opportunity to exert a natural talent he possessed in that way. Mrs. Green did not entrust the matter to her daughter. She was very young, but had evinced something of her father's temper in the silent acuteness of her feelings, though never displayed in the fierce and resentful outbreaks which threw him perpetually into his own light, and constituted himself through life his own principal enemy.

No one could be more grieved than Mrs.

Gullibull was when she learned the disastrous termination of her sister's career. Not that she had taken any means to prevent its happening—but then she never thought it would happen. She was so flourishing, so rich, so well off in every respect, herself, that she never thought of anybody connected with her being in want of almost everything she possessed in such superfluity. She consoled herself with the belief that her sister was doing very well—that if she wanted anything, in reality, she would apply to her—especially after the death of the proud clerk. She often quoted aphorisms to herself which she had deduced from excellent premises, doubtless: if people were too proud to ask, they should go without: we cannot all be rich: and one is not bound to disgrace oneself with a lot of poor relations, because one achieves wealth by one's own industry: the Greens had only one child to provide for, and she herself had two—for there was a son as well as a daughter in the house of Gullibull. But,

after all, when the thing did really happen —when Mrs. Green departed this life, principally for want of the means of living—Mrs. Gullibull was visited with no slight sentiments of compunction and regret. She received the orphan at once into her own house—at least after she had performed a quarantine of two or three months at some country place—and really laboured hard to quiet her consciousness of unkindness to the mother by kindness to the child. Kindness in her way, at all events. Mrs. Gullibull had received but little education herself, and none at all of a fashionable sort. Yet she spared no expense in a fruitless endeavour to make the orphan left to her charge accomplished, by overwhelming her with instructions and instructors. But poor Charity was too old to begin her schooling—nor was she naturally of very brilliant parts—but of quiet good sense, and a gentle loving heart, reserved in its utterances, but full, as a sealed fountain, to the brim.

She made so little progress in all the fine things attempted to be taught her, that, at last, this educational forcing was abandoned in despair, or rather, new avocations and changed views rendered it an object of indifference to Mrs. Gullibull, who, consequently, ceased tormenting her *protegée* on the subject. The marriage of her daughter into an aristocratic family of rank so exalted as the Fitzhautons, upset all Mrs. Gullibull's notions on matters, divine and human. And not only hers, but those of a personage of some importance in our history, and of very great in his own circle, whom we shall, therefore, take the opportunity to introduce.

Will it be believed by any one familiar with the influence of enormous wealth on the human mind, that, up to the date of the signal event above mentioned, Mrs. Gullibull had viewed with complacency, had even tacitly encouraged, an attachment which arose between her only son, Midas Gullibull, and Charity Green, her penniless

niece? But, until bedazzled out of her ordinary senses by the lustre of her daughter's acquired rank, she was, as we have said, a kindhearted and liberal woman, in the main, to those whom she liked. She could not easily forget how she had suffered her sister to die forlorn and penniless, while she herself luxuriated in the lap of wealth. She doted on her son, Midas, whom she looked upon as a prodigy of human excellence and sagacity, and as the future founder of a race of merchant princes, which might vie even with the hereditary glories of her daughter's alliance, if in nothing else, at least in wealth. And Midas either was, or imagined himself, at one time, very much in love with his deserted cousin.

On what occult principle of human nature can we, who take upon ourselves to dive into her depths, and bring up her secrets to the surface, account for this extraordinary fact? Midas had from his earliest childhood breathed an atmosphere heavy, as it were, with gold dust; from his

faintest dawn of reason all his impressions had been somehow or another connected with money; how to get it, how to keep it, how to make more of it, how to live for it, and how to die with it. Money, money, money, nothing but money! His very name, which his mother in her own secret heart could not help suspecting not to be a Christian one, was given him at the font by a rich godfather, of a somewhat satirical and jesting humour, perhaps, who was permitted to bestow it on the strength of some vague intimations as to the possible destination of his wealth, having no family of his own to leave it to.

Midas was seven or eight years older than his sister, and he was born before the admirably managed speculations of his father, and a beautiful year of famine, enabled the corn-merchant to achieve the great fortune which he had ever since continued increasing. Young Midas was accordingly, at a very early age, perched at a desk, and a ledger continued to be the

principal book into which, for many years, he looked, after leaving a commercial school at the age of fourteen. There he had acquired the following accomplishments: he could write an excellent business-hand, and spell almost every English word he ever used, with the assistance of a little pocket Johnson: he was familiar with the most recondite mysteries of single and double entry: he had learned the rules of the English grammar by heart, without any very distinct idea of how to apply them: he had gone as far as the verbs in his Latin grammar, and had some faint idea that there was such a language as Greek: he had written all Hamel's French themes out, with admirable neatness, in a little blue-ruled book; and returned home with first-rate testimonials to his moral character, as a schoolboy, while "in our establishment."

When the family attained their great position as millionaires, Midas's tastes were, however, destined to undergo some

fluctuations. His almost insatiable love of wealth, as a means of acquiring distinction, was augmented and yet changed in its manner of display, by the influence of his mother, and the aristocratic elevation of his sister. But before that event happened he had become, in some inexplicable manner, entangled in a secret engagement with his cousin, Charity!

How it befel that Midas Gullibull committed this solitary act of generous imprudence throughout his career, might puzzle Œdipus. Grasping, hard-hearted, aspiring, what could he discern to tempt him in a poor, timid, helpless sort of a girl, whose vocation on earth seemed to be an incessant attention to the wants and pleasures of others? But befal it did. Charity Green was the only young female to whose society Midas Gullibull had ever been closely habituated; and, after all, in spite of his money, he was human! The gentleness of Charity's manners, the placid sweetness of her disposition, won in some manner im-

perceptibly on his liking. Besides, she was, in reality, a pretty and well-made girl; and when she spoke naturally, and without being alarmed, spoke very sensibly, and in a voice that glided with an unconscious pathos to the heart. The sorrows and privations of her youth breathed like a plaintive key-note through her tones, and touched a chord even in the unmusical soul of Midas Gullibull.

But how had he won the affections of this young girl; for doubtless, at one time, she loved him with all the fervour that can be united with the purity of passion? Alas! it is not difficult to win the love of a woman whose heart is as yet virgin of every other attachment — of a woman desolate and alone in the world, who imagines that the priceless gifts of love are offered to her acceptance! Midas was tall and rather good looking, with a fresh complexion, a large, square, strong-minded forehead, and hair which, if a little too deep in its sanguine chestnut hues, could only be pro-

nounced positively red in the whiskers. He was universally regarded with awe and respect as the destined principal and immediate partner of the great house of Gullibull, Gullibull and Co.; and there is nothing that women admire more in their lovers than the admiration of others! In short, Midas was Charity Green's first love, and what love cannot find, he creates in his object. He was her only hope of redemption from the oppressive dependence in which she found her lot now cast—from the wide gulf of poverty and misery that yawned all around it. No wonder she returned her cousin's professions of attachment with a sincere and implicit faith and love, which the human heart is only destined to experience one for another.

We cannot blame poor Charity for these matters, more especially as Mrs. Gullibull seemed, for motives before touched on, rather to encourage the affair than otherwise. As to Gullibull, senior, he took but little notice of what happened in his house-

hold; and even if he had, would not have dreamed of interfering with his son's choice of his wife, his equal in everything but wealth. Old Gullibull spent night and day in labouring to acquire money, to add to his already enormous share by every species of exertion. But he was not in the slightest degree avaricious; in fact, he suffered his wife and children to use it almost as profusely as they desired. He wished for riches, but it was rather to enjoy the sway and distinction they conferred upon him, than for any real use they were to him. He had no great taste for luxury or any kind, unless it might be in eating and drinking; the poorest clerk in a counting-house scarcely drudged more anxiously and assiduously than this possessor of hundreds of thousands. His greatest satisfaction was to go about on 'Change, very slatternly dressed, with his hands in his pockets, hearing people whisper to the uninitiated, "That is Mr. Gullibull, the great corn merchant!" When his wife found out a new

method of gratifying this vanity, which she abundantly shared, by displays of ostentatious magnificence during his mayoralty—by the grand alliance she formed for his daughter—and the career of fashion she began herself to run, the worthy Alderman joined as cordially in her projects of wasting his money as ever he did with any of his brethren in means to make it.

But we do blame poor Charity on another score; which is, that she consented to let her engagement with her cousin remain, for the present, as he said, a secret. It seems, according to the reasons he alleged, that he did not consider himself able to keep a wife—at least, not in the style becoming *his* wife—until he had achieved a great object. What that object was—how much he thought necessary to keep a wife on—he did not think proper distinctly to enunciate. Perhaps he was a little ashamed to own his exact purpose, perhaps he scarcely knew it himself; but subsequent events confirm us in a conjecture, that he wished his father to

retire from the business, and leave its entire management and proceeds to himself. Gullibull, senior, who loved business for its own sake, as well for its money-making powers, was not very likely to accede easily to this arrangement. A new delay arose from the derangement in the circulation of the house, caused by the heavy bleeding it sustained in furnishing the fortune which was necessary to purchase a coronet for its daughter. Then the great merchant, in addition to a formidable hazard in what are called bread-stuffs, in city parlance, had entered with such eagerness and voracity into the ruling mania of the day—railway speculation, that it was no longer possible to hope for any speedy accomplishment to Midas's hopes.

Meanwhile he succeeded in persuading Charity, in spite of her own better sense and feeling, that it was advisable to continue keeping their engagement unannounced. He convinced her, and he himself half believed it, that his parents would not consent to so

disproportionate an alliance; and that it was necessary he should be thoroughly independent of their judgment before he ventured to outrage it by wedding a portionless girl. No doubt he really thought that he might endanger his prospects to gain possession of what he coveted, in exposing himself to animadversion by an act of such signal imprudence. He was certain that all his citizen friends—all the personages who formed his world of opinion—would disapprove in the highest degree of such folly. For after the warmth of his first attachment began to subside, and the comfortable certainty of having nothing to fear, had deprived him of the lover's chief spurs in hope and emulation, Midas began to discover that he really had no excuse to offer to public opinion, as he understood it, for the choice of such a wife. There was neither beauty, nor brilliant accomplishments, nor wit, nor rank, nor power, nor money, to be offered in apology to the sneers of the city. There was nothing but tenderness of heart, sim-

plicity and integrity of soul, a firmness and fixedness of principle, belied to the casual observer by timidity and sternly-taught meekness of character. Persons of sincerity and good faith are easily deceived, especially by those whom they love. But whether deceived or not altogether, Charity Green believed in, or yielded to, her lover's arguments, and the more easily, that her inward integrity and disinterestedness of spirit revolted from all the appearances of contrary emotions. She feared that she should seem to have made an unfair use of her position in the family of Mrs. Gullibull, by endeavouring to thrust herself into a more important station without her sanction; that she should seem to take an undue advantage of a young man's passions, to occupy it prematurely, and bring about dissensions in a home which had received her into its protection from motives of kindness. She shrunk from the indelicacy of appearing more anxious for the fulfilment of a compact of such a nature than its male co-partner. But however or

whatever was the cause, certain it is, that up to the moment when we introduce her to the reader, Charity Green, as her father had called her in the bitterness of his spirit, continued Charity Green.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT a time we have been introducing a personage to the reader, who, according to the usages of modern society, would be scarcely thought worth introducing at all, to any one!

Authors may in this respect be likened to those superior intelligences who receive a heavenly commission to spy into the doings of our nether world, and by no means send up such reports as are in general acceptation among us, its worthy inhabitants. But more wrongs than ever Don Quixote hazarded his chivalric skeleton against has the pen righted, and shall right, until the golden age return! com-

plaining, possibly, only of ennui. And even if it doth this good work only in theory—only in imagination—still is it well done; still do we exercise a great function on earth,—eternal witnesses of eternal morals; handing to one another the resplendent torch which Prometheus lighted in Heaven; scattering those salty drops from the vasty sea of truth, which keep the atmosphere of the earth from absolute corruption, from swathing it utterly in the foul damp of human breath! To descend from our heroics,—authors are like other people; and where they have no particular or personal reason to the contrary, will generally take the side of truth and justice, as we have done in our exposition of the relations between Mr. Midas Gullibull and his cousin.

"You can say it is Charity's awkwardness; she is always overthrowing things at home, you know," we left Mrs. Gullibull saying, with all the coolness of a general in a despatch, laying the blame of a failure on the most convenient inferior that occurs to

him at the moment. But Charity had quite a reputation for awkwardness "at home;" acquired by the undoubted fact, that when she first arrived at her aunt's, she broke a cup of a beautiful set of China teathings, in her haste to set it down to hand her uncle the muffins.

"It is of no consequence; I don't care who they think broke it—the things are not theirs," replied Lady Fitzhauton, loftily. "Come along, mamma; you have never seen Viscount Deville, and here he is."

"Law! Viscount Deville?" said Mrs. Gullibull, blushing up in the face and wiping it, as if washing it, in her handkerchief. "I should like, above all things!—wasn't it he that killed the man in a duel, I don't know how long ago—before we left Fagg Lane?"

"No, mamma, he never killed any one," replied the only daughter, pettishly. "But do come on; it's so stupid to keep people staring to see what is coming—and we are in a hurry to go out. Lord Deville, this is mamma—Mrs. Gullibull."

His lordship rose, and Mrs. Gullibull returned his bow with a curtsy she had acquired, with infinite toil, under a most experienced opera-dancer, for her presentation at Court as Lady Mayoress.

"I believe I have had the pleasure to see Mrs. Gullibull before. I was honoured with an invitation with the ministers when Mr. Alderman Gullibull presided over the city hospitalities," said Viscount Deville.

"Were you? I am sure your lordship was very welcome; but we had so many I never noticed any one in particular," replied the liberal ex-hostess of the Mansion House. "I believe I know all the rest, Ann. Why, you have quite a *soirée* this morning! How d'ye do, Miss Scurmucheon? How *are* you, Mrs. Sparkleton?—All alive and chirpy as ever!"

"Since you are so good as to ask after our healths, *en masse*, I hope I am right in answering — Very well," replied Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Well, at any rate you are all looking

as fresh as leeks," said Mrs. Gullibull, with great hilarity. "Don't let any one disturb for me; I can sit anywhere."

"I suppose, madam, because you feel, like the King of France's ambassador, that wherever you sit becomes the principal place," said Lord Deville, in his gentle tones, which only meant satire to those who were familiar with its blandishments.

"I can't quite say that, your lordship, though I am not a person that can only be seen through a microscope; or like those Lilliputians in the story-book," said Mrs. Gullibull, seating herself in the best place and chair with a plump, satisfied bump and puff. "I have brought you such a splendid booquet, Ann; would do sore eyes good. At any rate, you Londoners ought to be glad to see it. Where's Miss Green? What have you done with the nosegay, Charity?"

Miss Green had almost unobservedly slunk down on an ottoman beside her aunt, and under shadow of her vast lace shawl

imagined herself screened from publicity. There was nothing that Charity disliked or dreaded so much as being an object of observation to fine people—such very fine people as she now found herself in company with. She started like a guilty thing; yet she was only, with the utmost timidity of being detected in the act, looking at Mrs. Sparkleton, from the depths of her veil, purposely only half withdrawn. "I left it in the carriage, ma'am," was the reply.

"Then go and fetch it. Didn't I tell you it was for Lady Fitzhauton?" said Mrs. Gullibull, angrily; and the poor girl had almost reached the door, before Lord Deville could interpose, though he did so instantly.

"Oh, no, Miss Green!—certainly not—I'll go myself rather—but a servant will bring it directly," said his lordship, ringing a bell; and though by no means a sentimentalist, he was a little touched with the expression that lighted for one brief evanescent instant in the eyes of Charity Green,

as she ventured to raise them, for that period, to her rescuer. Nevertheless, Mrs. Gullibull continued to reprimand her sharply for her inattention and carelessness, apologising to the company at intervals, by declaring that all she could do or say had not the most trifling influence in diminishing the girl's characteristic vices of dulness and neglect of everything that was said to her; until Mrs. Sparkleton impatiently interrupted by inquiring what kind of a *bucket* it was—whether it was any new hydraulic invention for watering flowers?

"Why, it's flowers themselves!—don't you know what a booquet is?" said Mrs. Gullibull, much surprised.

"Mamma means a *bouquet*," said her daughter, with an extremely vexed glance at Mrs. Sparkleton, who, however, looked the picture of innocence, and replied, with a sweet smile, "Oh, yes, I understand now—a nosegay. We are all in the flower way this morning—but really the flowers are a little in ours, if we are to stay very long

for this *bouquet.*" The word was pronounced with the very slightest possible imitation of Mrs. Gullibull's pronunciation, but it was appreciated, not only by the polished Viscount, but by the poor relation. The one smiled imperceptibly—the other coloured visibly. "She is not an ugly girl," thought Mrs. Sparkleton, "nor half so vulgar as her betters: I wonder what she is?"

She had seen her half a dozen times before—she had even greatly admired some exquisite lace of her manufacture,—Mrs. Gullibull's shawl to wit,—but had never troubled herself with this query until now. Nor much even now. The bouquet made its appearance, and Mrs. Sparkleton's attention was immediately absorbed in it.

"What an enormous heap of flowers!—what a giant nosegay! It is as large as a bunch of cabbages!" she exclaimed. "Why, Mrs. Gullibull! you should wear it as an horticultural triumph, in your bonnet, and go with us to parade it at Chiswick."

"But what's doing at Chiswick that I

should go to Chiswick?" said Mrs. Gullibull, eagerly. "Is his grace giving a party, and may any one go that likes?"

"Any one that has a ticket! But it is not to the Duke's, but to the Horticultural Society's Gardens," explained Mrs. Sparkleton; "we are all going there, and ought to be gone."

"I'll go, too, and Charity can go on to her uncle in the city—but shouldn't I want the carriage?" exclaimed Mrs. Gullibull. "We were going to the city about some business—but it will do another time—or Charity might go with us, only she is in such a pickle. I never can get that girl to make herself fit to be seen!"

"But, mamma, Lord Deville and Mrs. Sparkleton are fellows—and I don't think they can let in every one," said Lady Fitzhauton, taking the advice on her own account, which she had rejected from her husband, concerning the advisability of dispensing with Mrs. Gullibull's appearance in all her parties.

"Is Mrs. Sparkleton a 'fellow'?" replied the mother, with a dubious look at the lady mentioned.

"Don't search me for a beard, nevertheless," said Mrs. Sparkleton, who could not hinder herself from laughing outright.

"And so am I—but I have unluckily disposed of all my tickets, excepting those for myself and Lady Fitzhauton," observed Lord Deville.

"I don't know whether I have one left or not," said Mrs. Sparkleton, maliciously searching her reticule, though she well knew she had not. "No, I have not! But, then, people can buy as many as they like at the gates, you know, Lord Deville."

"I never bought any, so I can't say," replied his lordship, with well-concealed vexation.

"And Lord Deville will have an arm vacant, for I shall soon meet with somebody or another, I know, that will not let

me wander alone like a Didone abbandonnata," pursued Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Oh, then, you would be jealous of mamma, and that would never do," said Lady Fitzhauton, triumphantly.

"Indeed; I should not! How is your son, Mr. Gullibull, madam? One never sees him now,—that is, I have not seen him since I saw him last at your house?" returned Mrs. Sparkleton, with wonderful dexterity. No one could look more pleased than the mother of the gentleman inquired about; nor well look sadder, though no one noticed it, than his silent cousin.

"But out of sight is not out of mind with him, Mrs. Sparkleton! He talks of nothing but you day and night, and has entered your name twice in the ledger instead of two Russian ones, as different as chalk from cheese," said Mrs. Gullibull, very eagerly. "And for the matter of company, you and I could walk together. I dare say we should not be ashamed of each other; at least, I'm sure I shouldn't of you!

And if I can get in by paying, I don't care what the ticket is. I'm not so reduced but what I can afford a little enjoyment now and then."

Mrs. Sparkleton shuddered inwardly; but although she deserved the fate she had brought on herself, she was determined not to suffer its extremities.

"Oh, I believe you might almost get into Paradise with your money, Mrs. Gullibull; but although I am a 'fellow,' I cannot be your cavalier on this occasion. I am to play damsel to a third person."

"And besides, mamma, you could not possibly go in that great ugly bonnet," remonstrated Lady Fitzhauton.

"What's the matter with the bonnet, Nanny?" returned Mrs. Gullibull, precipitately. "I am sure it ought to be a good one. I paid seven guineas for it not ten days ago! And, by-the-bye, I am much obliged to you, Mrs. Sparkleton, for recommending me to that dear Madame Millefleurs."

"*Dear* enough at times! I knew her in

Paris; a very worthy woman, with a man depending upon her," replied Mrs. Sparkleton.

"A man!" echoed Miss Scurmucheon, for the first time joining in the discussion.

"A husband, at least. I don't call such people gentlemen," returned Mrs. Sparkleton.

"And I'm sure I don't! Gentlemen, indeed! But we have grown so democratic that everybody is aristocratic now-a-days," said the high-born maiden. "Well, you have quite made her fortune by the introduction; but you are always so charitable to deserving objects, so very charitable, Mrs. Sparkleton! But talking of charities, what shall I put you down to my subscription for the Spiritual Relief of the Starving Population of——"

"Fifty pounds!" interrupted Mrs. Gullibull, "if it's noticed by any genteel people. Who are in it? Where are they starving? In Ireland, I suppose?"

"It is always fashionable to subscribe to Miss Scurmucheon's charities—with your name," said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Let me be down for fifty, then; or you can divide it, and put the other half to Lady Fitzhauton's name, and that will do the handsome for us both," replied Mrs. Gullibull. "But why won't my bonnet do, Ann?"

"It is far too wide in front; and, besides, Mrs. Sparkleton has sent away her carriage, and there is only room in mine for us; and papa will expect you to take him home," energetically reasoned Lady Fitzhauton.

"He could come in the omnibus; he is not above that, even now!" returned Mrs. Gullibull.

"But there is Midas, would be quite offended; and you said you had business in the city!"

"So Midas would! And as to business, that puts me in mind, I came to invite you all (to be sure, I did not know his lordship and Miss Scurmucheon were here); but I

shall be delighted to see you *all* to our great dinner party next Saturday!" said Mrs. Gullibull, with imposing solemnity. "I was only going to give some orders about the turtle-soup, for it is to be a first-rate spread. You'll all come, of course, when I tell you who is to be there! The great Mr. Humson himself, and who but he!"

There was a full moment's pause; but had Mrs. Gullibull announced that the Apostle Paul was to be of the party, we doubt if the announcement would have excited so lively an interest and awe. Still the invitation was so curiously worded and abrupt, that Mrs. Sparkleton, who hoped somebody else would begin the acceptings, was obliged to open the process.

"I shall be quite delighted—extremely—to see a man that really occurs to one like an incarnation of money-making!" she said. "But independently of that, the pleasure of seeing my kind friend, the Alderman (I want to consult him, too, on a little

plan of my own), and Mr. Gullibull—I shall really be quite delighted!"

"I am afraid I have but slight claims on Mrs. Gullibull's hospitality; but I am so happy when—I am really quite flattered by the kindness," said the peer.

"Do we dine at Putney? Of course, I suppose—*fifty pounds*," said Miss Scurmucheon, taking out her tablets, which, like Hamlet, she always carried to put down noticeable facts. "And now I have my memoranda out, do let me put you down something, Mrs. Sparkleton—the merest trifle in the world?"

"Put me down, then—all the real charity in the world! for positively I'll not subscribe except in the way I mentioned," replied the equally imperturbable Mrs. Sparkleton. "And now, are we going or not to the Flower Show?"

"Of course we dine at Pootney! Do you think I would invite ladies and gentlemen to dinner in the city, Miss Scurmucheon?"

said Mrs. Gullibull, with some violence. "Pootney Villa! everybody knows it within five miles around. Eight o'clock's the hour! How sorry I am, I am not at home to-day, and you could all have lunched with me as you went."

"I am not at all hungry," said Mrs. Sparkleton, rising at last in her impatience. "And though I should have been delighted to see both the Mr. Gullibulls—time and the tide, Lady Fitzhauton, are no more civil to women than to men."

"Let us be gone, then," said Lord Deville, also rising.

"I have been wanting to go this hour," said Lady Fitzhauton. "I am quite tired of waiting. Tell papa, I wonder he never comes to see me now. Oh, and I am much obliged to you, Miss Green" (Lady Fitzhauton never called her cousin by her familiar, but puritanical, and too suggestive name) "for the pretty chairbacks you have worked me; only they are such a

shockingly glaring pattern, Miss Scurmuchcon says I cannot possibly use them."

"I thought—I thought—you liked gay patterns?—it was a design by some great master, they told me—at the shop," said Charity, greatly confused.

"I thought they would not do *exactly* for a lady in my niece's position," said Miss Scurmuchcon, obligingly. "But I am sure, Miss Grin—I beg your pardon, Miss Grigg,—I greatly admired them, for I begged them for one of my own little rooms, where they are not so conspicuous, for it is a very dark place indeed; one can't go anywhere respectable where there's the least gleam of sunshine!"

"Well, but I'll go to the Flower Show, after all!" exclaimed Mrs. Gullibull, rising also, and in an excited, eureka tone. "I'll cut to the city at once, and get Gullibull to come back with me, as hard as we can tear to it. All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy! A little recreation will do him good; and, I am sure, Midas will be as

pleased as Punch at the chance of seeing you, Mrs. Sparkleton! La! don't colour so, ma'am; I am sure I meant no harm! Come, Charity, let's be off; I am sure we haven't a moment to lose!"

CHAPTER X.

THE newspapers all pronounced there never was a more charming day, never a more brilliant Flower Show, than on the occasion which we find to record their unanimity. Certainly, on such historical points they ought to be believed, and, in fact, on such but very rarely state anything diametrically opposite to the truth.

There was a gorgeous blue sky, very bright and hot, overhead — compared by everybody that had never seen one, to an Italian noonday. The blue was too blue—too deep and watery in its hues, for those that had, to think of such a comparison. The gardens bloomed like Eden; parterres flaming

with beautiful flowers, grass-walks carpeted with their smoothest verdure, orchard-trees in full bearing, the conservatory shining like transparent silver; it was a scene which, if exhibited in any foreign country, would have been pronounced wonderfully gay and splendid. Everything was in gala costume—flowers, plants, and humanity. The tropical specimens themselves, allowed in many instances by their tender nurses to take the air in the open sunshine, looked quite at home, and seemed to enjoy themselves. The best company in London was present, meaning, of course, some dozen sets of people who considered themselves such, and a whole world of nobodies. Two actual dukes were verily present,—the one, alleged to be made of iron, stooping like a column of that temple of Mars, which some good people imagine to be altogether tumbling to ruin and rubbish,—the other, the patron of the fête.

The fashion, the beauty, the wealth, the everything of the great metropolis, were, in

fact, assembled in a little space. *Multum in parvo*, indeed! which quotation, and others equally new and recondite, which we shall occasionally introduce, will, we hope, satisfy the reader of the extent of our classical attainments. Flora herself might have condescended to be present; and, but for the imputations against her character, more than insinuated in mythologies for the use of schools, we should have declared she was actually so. But in such good and perfectly correct society, as that into which we have brought our reader, we dare not hazard so bold a poetical liberty.

Human and botanical beauties seemed alike contending, in all their bravery, for the prize of loveliness. Smiles of the soul or of the sun lighted up their charms in rivalry; the sweetest scents of the toilette of nature mingled with the most refined essences of art; there was movement, and seemingly enjoyment, everywhere; the twitter of birds, the chat and hum of lively voices, the music of two or three brilliant

bands. But Lord Fitzhauton had found time to be tired of everything before the party from his house arrived. Tired of exchanging how-d'ye-do's with acquaintances; tired of vaunting the capabilities of his new horse; tired of the flowers; tired of the music; tired of voting the whole thing a bore; tired of himself—when the longed-for group entered the gardens. In a moment, he had transferred Mrs. Sparkleter's arm to his own with a joy, a gaiety, a reanimation of features, of existence apparently, which did not at all diminish Lady Fitzhauton's intention and resolve to be perfectly satisfied with the company assigned to her in the person of Viscount Deville.

She had really no reason to be otherwise, so far as society was concerned, for Lord Deville was the most amusing gossip in the world, when he pleased. Thoroughly acquainted with the world, a man of wit and observation, he could not fail to fascinate the attention of the young parvenu countess

with his gaiety and sarcastic humour and anecdote. He knew everybody, apparently, that was worth knowing—in any manner noticeable—without confining himself to the vulgar distinctions of rank and wealth, as the wise have been pleased to pronounce them, from their tubs. Lady Fitzhauton's wounded pride and feelings were flattered by the attentions and homage of a man who was evidently an object of such, from almost everybody else. She felt comforted and strengthened by so powerful a protection; above all, she was animated by a secret sentiment of jealous rivalry, hidden so deeply in the very core of her heart, that she herself scarcely suspected its presence there. She would let her husband see, she thought, that it was not impossible to imitate *some* of the graces of Mrs. Sparkleton's manner; she would let that lady herself see that it was not impossible to contest her empire where she believed it most secure. In short, Lady Fitzhauton was jealous, and did not know it;

and she was not particularly sagacious in concealing her sentiments, so Lord Deville did, and acted on the knowledge.

Somehow or another, he managed to engage the attention of his fair companion so exclusively, that at last she forgot to look back, every now and then, to see if Mrs. Sparkleton and her husband were at hand; forgot to miss the incessant murmur of their voices and light vivacious laughter. The truth is—and be certain, reader, that when we say so, we mean to tell it—Mrs. Sparkleton (who was a great flower-fancier) lingered occasionally to look at some rare specimen of some rare tribe, to point out some wonderful double calyx or petal to Lord Fitzhauton, and laughingly rate him for the little interest he took in the subject; until, at last, (by the merest chance in the world) the parties lost sight of each other. It was of no consequence, however; Lord Fitzhauton said they should be sure to meet again before the thing was half over.

Lord Deville seemed scarcely so well content, when at last he noticed the circumstance. "Dear me! Mrs. Sparkleton and Fitzhauton have vanished, I declare! Where can they be?" he said, with a very well acted expression of surprise and dissatisfaction.

"Oh, what matter? They are not like the Babes in the Wood—they will be sure to find their way home again," said Lady Fitzhauton, pettishly. "I wonder you trouble so much about them. I am sure I don't think they would care the least in the world if I and you were to lose ourselves for good!"

"That would be delightful," replied the Viscount, resuming their promenade with a lively step, "if we were only lost *together!* In some deep wood, now, like Chiswick Grove, yonder—in the Duke of Devonshire's grounds, I mean—in fact, I should like his villa too; it would be a perfect little Paradise then, indeed, in such company!"

"How you do flatter!" replied Lady

Fitzhauton. "But it will not do with me; everybody knows that you are engaged to Mrs. Sparkleton, and that you love her to distraction. Only people wonder why you don't get married!—I am sure I do. If I was very fond of a person, and could get them to have me, I am certain—I think—I should marry them directly."

"By special licence?" said his lordship, playfully.

"Of course. It is so very vulgar now to be married by bans," replied the unconscious countess.

"Yet I think I should be married by bans."

"Why?—I thought you studied fashion above all things?"

"No, fashion studies me!" replied Deville, with a smile. "I really do not boast—the tailors insist on putting my name to half their new cuts, merely because I take care, in general, that my clothes fit. They have not half so good a reason for so doing as I could discern in calling yonder

Hybride celestiale—the prize rose there—*Fitzhauton celestiale!* But why I should prefer to be married by bans is this, that I could not be married suddenly—that I should have time to reflect—and so, probably, forbid them myself—at worst, at the third time of asking."

"You do not mean to say—why, is not Mrs. Sparkleton considered a most desirable match? Is she not very handsome? Would not anybody in his senses jump at her?"

"As they do at cherries—perhaps only to get their teeth jerked out?" said Deville, but halting, and looking over the gay and changeable groups around. "She is, indeed, a most brilliant woman—one liked and admired by everybody! I wonder what has got them?—But such a terrible coquette, that a man should be head-over-ears in love with her, indeed, before he ventured on committing matrimony with her. Can you see Fitzhauton anywhere?"

"I shall not take the trouble to look for him; if he wanted to keep our company he

need not have lost us. His eyes are not at the back of his head! I believe he has done it on purpose," said Lady Fitzhauton, very disdainfully.

"You make me quite jealous, I declare! But I have every reason to forgive him," said his lordship—with a pause and a sigh.

"Jealous!—jealous of Mrs. Sparkleton with Lord Fitzhauton?" replied the young wife, with a mingled anger and scorn that confessed apprehensions they seemed to deny.

"At least, I should have been, in former times,—if I had loved Mrs. Sparkleton," replied the Viscount. "I mean, of course, before Fitzhauton's marriage—his harvest of love—when he was sowing his wild oats."

"But Mrs. Sparkleton was married then, herself!" said the lady, with quickening complexion.

"Ah, so she was—I am merely talking nonsense to amuse you—and at Paris people's manners are so different! They

think no harm whatever of a thing there that would make one's hair stand on end in England. I believe there are moral as well as physical influences, in climate, and though Paris now-a-days is almost as near again as it used to be, I own that I have seen things done there, without the least emotion, that would quite shock me in London."

"I have been in Paris—but I did not notice anything of the kind?" said Lady Fitzhauton, dubiously.

"I speak of the interior workings of society. When you were there, I suppose, you principally devoted yourself to sight-seeing—and there is really a great deal in Paris to attract an enlightened curiosity."

"I believe we saw everything in Paris, excepting a revolution—they had one just before we were there, and another just after we left—I mean, they had a fight and all that sort of thing in the streets," said Lady Fitzhauton, with the utmost integrity of simplicity. "I really think I

should almost have enjoyed it—because nobody would have been killed that one cared about, and it would have been so curious to see a real battle from the windows of an hotel. We lodged at the Bedford—where did you?"

"I had a house for some time—in fact, for several years, in Paris," replied his lordship, sedately.

"How queer!—Did you ever meet your wife there? Oh, no, not your wife!—I beg pardon, I mean, Mrs. Captain Fauxpas?"

Yes, Lord Deville—Lord Deville himself—coloured! The amazing malaproposity (excuse the bad coinage for its good metal) of the question struck him dumb. In anybody else's case he would have been diverted beyond measure. It was full a minute before he gained breath to answer.

"There was *a* Mrs. Fauxpas whom I occasionally met with in Paris, in society, if you allude to her?"

Lady Fitzhauton herself was suddenly conscious of the extreme impropriety of

her query, which she had overlooked in the first impulse of curiosity. She blushed scarlet, and made matters worse by attempting an apology in which she broke down. "I don't, of course, mean anybody in particular of that name—only I have heard—I don't believe a word of it—but if you met her in society it must have been quite a different person, because you know they never admit any woman of that sort anywhere—at least Mrs. Sparkleton says they cannot go to court if it is known what they are—if they are found out!"

"Of course: that is what renders one's character so precious," said Lord Deville, rather coldly. "But we have strayed from the subject; it was by mere accident I met Mrs. Fauxpas in society. I believe Mrs. Sparkleton was at the same party. People are not so particular, in Paris; they make no inquiries—though as to any scandal that might attach to Mrs. Fauxpas' name, it is well known, to everybody but the most prejudiced, there was no foundation

whatever for imputing any blame whatever to either of the parties."

In this manner Lord Deville got rid of the assurances of his memory, that there was a good deal more in the legend than even the undoubted facts, that he had fought a duel and paid damages on account of a lady whom he had afterwards met "in society," as a perfect stranger. But the abrupt revival of the recollections associated did him some good. They inculcated more caution and reserve in his present proceedings; they had *that* moral effect. Besides, he had skilfully restored Mrs. Sparkleton's personage to the scene, in company with disquieting ideas.

"And was Lord Fitzhauton there? Did they know one another in Paris? But of course they did: I know that very well."

"I was not aware," replied the Viscount, carelessly.

"They often talk about Paris; but the Colonel was alive then? What sort of a man was Colonel Sparkleton?"

"Let me try and remember. He was of good stature, rather stout, with a port-wine complexion, a chestnut wig, and—I think that is all—except that he tied his cravat on principle."

"How do you mean? tie a cravat on principle!"

"It was all the principle I think he had, at all events; but I only mean he was rather particular in his dress."

"And was she very fond of him? Was Mrs. Sparkleton very fond of her husband? Come now, you need not be jealous of the poor man, since he is dead?" anxiously inquired the countess.

"Neither dead nor alive, I assure you very truly, Lady Fitzhauton. But he was jealous enough for all his successors on his own account; and if I should be jealous of any one it should be—but what nonsense we are talking! It is only because Mrs. Sparkleton and I like to talk together—(it cannot be denied she is a delightful woman in conversation)—else there is really no reason on

earth, that I am aware of, why people should have taken upon them to unite us in the bonds of holy matrimony."

"Is that now quite true? Don't deceive me; I really want to know," said Lady Fitzhauton, with a degree of triumph in the discovery of what she supposed to be the false hopes and speculations of the brilliant widow, which, however, sustained a sudden check. "Why, then, I certainly ought to look after him! I thought you were quite engaged. Where can they be?"

"I dare say they have gone to look at Mrs. Sparkleton's Fleur de Marie! She has a ridiculous fancy that a carnation of hers has been ill-used for not getting the prize, when there are at least a dozen more deserving specimens. But don't mention to any one my opinion that we are *not* engaged, for it is a great honour to me to have it thought we are; and perhaps, in the end, the prophecy may fulfil itself."

Singular as it may seem, Lady Fitzhauton was actually jealous of Lord Deville,

for an instant! Perhaps longer. At all events, a vague impression remained on her mind, that it would not altogether do to treat him with too much coolness, if she desired to secure for Mrs. Sparkleton a mortification she thought she richly deserved for flirting with other people's husbands.

"Really, it is quite strange what can have become of them!" she said. "Lord Fitzhauton might have taken some little notice of the way we were going."

"Why, you must get accustomed to that sort of thing, my dear Lady Fitzhauton, or you will be very miserable," replied his lordship, with a tender and sympathizing look. He had too much penetration not to discern, almost as clearly as Lady Fitzhauton herself, what was passing in her ratiocinative faculties.

"To what sort of thing?"

"To be neglected."

"By Charles? Never!" said the heiress, in a most determined manner.

"Then you will be a rare wife! By

Charles, you mean, of course, Lord Fitzhauton?" replied Deville, with an affectation of some curiosity, though he knew precisely that she could mean no one else. Somehow or another the familiarity of the designation did not please him.

"Don't you know that his name is Charles?" she returned, with some sharpness. "Oh, but I remember, he told me it was vulgar to call him by his name. Even if I have children, mamma says, I must only call them by their titles. But I believe I shall never be fashionable unless I have somebody to watch over me, night and day."

"Give *me* the office! I mean, you shall be my pupil, and I will teach you all I know in such matters," exclaimed Deville.

"What must I do, then, to be fashionable?" replied the lady, with a not altogether unconscious coquetry in her tones.

"In the first place, have you a heart?" said his lordship, in a tender low voice.

"A heart? Why, how could I live without a heart?"

"Oh, exceedingly well; in fact, you cannot live with one;" said Deville, who perhaps felt he was getting on slippery ground, and judged it necessary to retreat into persiflage. "Get rid of all that, to begin with. Keep all hours and none; buy everything you don't want, and pay for nothing you do; smile on all mankind but your husband; be happy everywhere but at home; hate the country; adore Paris; read novels; nurse lapdogs; see your children once a-day; go to church on Sundays; and die when your physician gives you over."

"But how can I smile on people when I don't care a pin for them?" said Lady Fitzhauton, smiling very sweetly at the noble satirist.

"Practise in a glass till you are able," replied he; and certainly at that moment his face mirrored Lady Fitzhauton's, "with a difference." In fact, a difference that made her involuntarily feel that it was necessary to retract. But she did not accomplish this manœuvre with the suavity of a

thorough-bred coquetry. She did it rather rudely, still without offending Lord Deville, whose jaded sense rejoiced in the novelty.

"But I care nothing for any man but Fitzhauton. Oh, yes, and papa!"

"For heaven's sake, let him never hear you say so — I mean, Fitzhauton — or he will hate you," replied Deville. "That is not the sort of treatment he requires. Jealousy is the only piquant sauce for a cold love, if it is served by neat-handed discretion."

"For a cold love? Is he so very cold, do you think—that is, to me?" inquired the wife, with sparkling eyes.

"Why, you must not pall him with sweets, as grand-dames teach children to leave the sugar alone. Besides, it would amuse you—a little flirtation or so. Women have so much solitude, even when they move in the best society; and I should think they must get tired occasionally even of novels and worsted work! Not too much of it, of course; nothing incorrect, of course."

"Well, I do believe they flirt a great deal in good society, or else Mrs. Sparkleton tells terrible fibs," said Lady Fitzhauton, rather dubiously. "But how am I to make him jealous? I am sure I think he ought to be jealous now, letting me wander about alone with such a lady-killer as everybody says you are, Lord Deville."

"But I am such an established character, you know," (*re-established*, he might have said, with some propriety). "It is impossible for any one to be jealous of me; least of all, my dear friend—really one of the dearest I possess—Fitzhauton. But don't you think, at present, I have a right to be jealous of him, too—perhaps? I hope Mrs. Sparkleton is jealous of me—at all events I intend she should be!"

"Oh, then, you make me your cat's-paw?" said Lady Fitzhauton, very pettishly.

"You may make me yours," replied his lordship, with ardour; "though, jesting apart, I scarcely like to be stared at by the big, green, glaring eyes of jealousy. It is

like standing at a druggist's window, in the flame of one of their horrid coloured bottles. But he ought in mere politeness to be jealous; for any other man, with such an opportunity, would be sure to begin talking love to you."

"Talking love—to me?" replied Lady Fitzhauton, blushing, but not altogether with displeasure.

"Yes; how were it possible to refrain contemplating such blooming loveliness?"

"What! do people make love to their friends' wives in good society?"

"Men go mad in any for charms so perfect as yours!"

"Do they?"

"And rave! and then they tell you that they adore you—worship you—kiss the very air you breathe! have loved you from the first moment they beheld you—at your detested marriage it was! and would at this instant cheerfully die to win but one tear of yours!"

"Lord Deville!—but what nonsense you

do talk!" said Lady Fitzhauton, very much confused, and distressingly ignorant whether she ought to fly into a virtuous passion or treat the whole affair as a specimen of fashionable chit-chat. Lord Deville put her immediately out of doubt.

"You forget, I am your tutor. I am merely instructing you beforehand how to behave in a very possible contingency, considering how delightfully pleasing you are!"

"Oh, yes. Well, what ought I to have answered?"

"You ought to be very indignant at first; but not to get into a passion, or do anything silly. And then you ought to listen to reason. Why, if you took every little thing of that sort in a parvenu manner—that is, if you believed all the nonsensical stuff handsome women must hear in their time—Fitzhauton would be fighting a duel every other day, if he managed to survive."

"You fought a duel once, did you not?" said Lady Fitzhauton.

"I have almost forgotten—I believe I have fought one or two; but it is not a recreation in which I take any delight."

"Is it very horrible?"

"It is not very pleasant to be shot or run through with a sharp instrument," replied his lordship, philosophically.

"Then I am sure I do not want poor Charles to be killed; and people may be in love with me as much as they please—I shall never annoy him about it," said Lady Fitzhauton, with an energy that greatly pleased the Viscount.

"You are quite right—perfectly right; besides, people are always sure to blame more than the culpable party in such cases. They will say the lady must have encouraged—the husband must have neglected his wife; and re-al-ly"—Lord Deville always pronounced this word very emphatically, in three syllables—"and re-al-ly people

are almost always right when they think so."

"I am sure *I* would rather die than encourage anything of the kind!" replied the Countess, fiercely.

"One never uses such strong expressions in certain circles. But of course you would. You are no Mrs. Sparkleton, Lady Fitzhauton! Pardon me—pardon perhaps a sentiment of which I ought to be ashamed, which has no foundation perhaps but fancy. But *you* are as good as you are beautiful; and the man that could wrong you must be as unworthy of the name—as the man that could see you and not love you!"

And finding that, in the eagerness of conversation, they had strolled into a quiet, solitary walk, in the fervour of eulogistic eloquence the Viscount raised the little plump hand that reposed in its primrose glove on his arm, and pressed it to his lips. It was but an instant—too short a time for any one to take reasonable offence, especially after such a compliment, and such a

primary instruction. Lady Fitzhauton was vexed, flattered, pleased, amazed, doubtful, certain—all in a breath. A dangerous groundwork was established for the operations of the engineer, and there was, apparently, no fault to be found—no earth disturbed. Whatever she might have said or done in continuation, would, probably, only have involved her in greater perplexity, when, fortunately, an evasion appeared in the shape of a group of persons who suddenly entered the walk.

"There is mamma and all her party, and I am quite glad, for I declare we have talked one another hoarse."

CHAPTER XI.

And, verily, Mrs. Gullibull and all her party came sailing full into sight—a personage not to be mistaken, any more than a first-rate man-of-war with all her canvass and colours spread, majestically heaving along the bosom of the deep! Mrs. Gullibull did move with very much of the up-and-down progress of the comparison, though not, perhaps, with all its grandeur and vastness, while the rich flutter of the robes and ribands in which she was bedizened fully realized the ornamental portion of the simile. She had discreetly taken advantage of the heat of the day to purchase a new light Indian scarf of scarlet and gold gauze, which fluttered in every

direction around her. She had also an idea, energetically urged upon her by a *modiste* who wanted to get rid of certain superfluities in her stock, that feathers added to her height, and flashy colours detracted from the unfashionable ruddiness of her complexion. Accordingly, Mrs. Gullibull's bonnet was a wonder of rich hues and waving plumage.

It was not every one that would have liked to escort Mrs. Gullibull, in such array, through Chiswick Gardens, on a gala day. But the squire who enjoyed that honour was one well qualified, alike by nature and his own peculiar philosophy, to be perfectly insensible to any disadvantages attending it. Undoubtedly he possessed the first right to it, for he was Mrs. Gullibull's husband—Alderman Gullibull.

Alderman Gullibull! permit me to introduce him to you, reader. You observe that he is a man of middle height, verging on sixty, stoutly built, especially in the legs and shoulders, with no excess of aldermanic

protuberance, but with sufficient to vindicate his claims to civic honours. You will notice, with a shrug, that he wears gaiters; that his brown nether garments hang about him loosely, as if he loved ease a great deal better than elegance; that he wears a plaited frill shirt; that his waistcoat is of the colours of a wasp's belly; and that his coat is altogether out of date, for it is broad-tailed, narrow-collared, blue, and ornamented with large, bright, gilt buttons. Nevertheless, you will discern that every thing he has on is good and substantial, of the best materials; in short, you will perceive that he is of the old school of City merchants, and obstinately persists in continuing so; not for want of sense; you may see that, clearly, in his smiling, good-humoured visage, with its high, round, bald forehead, which expresses a good solid intellect, also of the old pattern. But there is a considerable mixture of obstinacy and opinionativeness in his countenance that prevents you from foreseeing an easy prey in

him, (if you are a sharper, dear reader!) unless you can only manage to turn his obstinacy into the way you wish him to go. Still, there is a sort of simplicity of good faith in his visage—a speculative credulity—which may encourage your hopes.

Alderman Gullibull was—as he himself delighted to tell, to the infinite vexation and confusion of his genteeler wife and family—a Prometheus of a peculiar kind, inasmuch as he had made himself! His father, in fact, was worse than a nobody—for he was a poor tallow-chandler. The son once related the fact, that he began business with no other capital than the savings of his apprenticeship,—from the Lord-Mayoral throne, at a grand City feast! To be sure, it was rather late in the evening, when a person might be pardoned for boasting a little. All that Mrs. Gullibull could not endure was, that he should boast of what she considered a great disgrace.

They differed on few other points besides this, or rather, it was only an extension of

the same principle wherever else they did not harmonise. Old Gullibull considered trade and money-making the greatest, grandest, most laudable, and honourable of pursuits. He had a mixture of dislike and contempt for almost every other species of eminence, especially for birth and rank, until he wedded his daughter to an aristocrat. But he was as fond as his wife of the consequence and display which the possession of wealth allows, and found no fault with her extravagance and profusion, since it gratified the desire natural to great riches, as well as to every other superiority, to find themselves acknowledged and done homage to. He had in a manner bought his daughter a peer of the realm for her husband, as he would have bought her any other glittering toy which might have pleased her fancy and illustrated his own capabilities in the way of cash.

Indeed, until he got into it thus, Gullibull railed very bitterly at, and really thought very ill of, the aristocracy. He

considered them as a species of lazy moths, devouring everything they came near, and doing nothing for their feed. He cut rather a great figure in the time of the Reform Bill, in stirring up the good citizens to strenuous exertions. It was even said, that he had declared on 'Change, that if the Duke of Wellington would not allow the Bill to pass, he himself would command the Birmingham, and other popular armies, that were expected to march to London on the occasion. But he was one of the foremost to rescue the great duke from a juvenile mob, that, forgetful of their father's days, were pelting his carriage with mud. And he had still a vague impression, that he had done a very foolish thing in suffering his daughter to wed a man whose chief motive was probably her money. But he was proud of the high rank of his son-in-law, and parted with a very considerable portion of his democracy at the altar where he saw her united to a descendant of a Norman conqueror.

Besides, his attention was absorbed, in general, in matters of much greater moment. He had a vast and precarious kind of business to conduct, which partook not a little of the nature of a game at chance, and communicated to it much of the interest attaching to such doubtful dies. He considered that his wife was able to look after his children, and fittest to manage everything but the money part of their happiness. He himself was happiest in his counting-house, at hard work; there he enjoyed and exerted all his faculties; there he was a god; his word, his very glance, law to twenty silent clerks. His continual success had given him an unlimited confidence in his own judgment, and an equally unbounded sway over the opinions of others in the like matters. Of latter years, indeed, some few might vaguely imagine that prosperity had rendered him somewhat too eager and speculative. This was especially the opinion of his son, but the Alderman had no great deference for that.

Fathers rarely get over the first profound impression which their children make upon them, viz., that they *are* children. But the natures of the men were opposed; and Midas—thrifty and timorous—a hoarder, almost a miser from his cradle, was perhaps, in secret, almost despised by his liberal and sanguine sire.

This contrast was visible to the observer, in the very manner and gait of the father and son, as they came along in company. Old Gullibull looked and felt supremely indifferent to the opinion of the aristocratic multitude traversing the scene. He looked proud of himself and all about him, including his too-gorgeous spouse, whom everybody that passed stared at with scarcely disguised wonder and curiosity. Midas Gullibull walked stiffly, arm-in-arm with the modest and very modestly-arrayed Charity Green, with averted countenance and manner, as if he was ashamed of her, but knew not how to rid himself of her company. Old Gullibull flourished his

walking-stick as he went—examined the flowers with its aid, in defiance of regulation—while his son seemed as if he were an implement of the sort himself, contrived by some Frankenstein of a mechanic.

Midas inherited little of his father's characteristics beside his fresh complexion; but he was tall and fleshy, and his figure was set off to the best advantage by a tight garb of the most fashionable cut. He looked, indeed, as if he had just stepped out of a plate of the fashions in a tailor's window, or out of a band-box, so scrupulously modish and trim was his array. The cares which his father's cheerful disposition mostly enabled him to leave in his counting house, haunted Midas everywhere. The mercantile passion of the former was the desire to win—with the latter, the dread to lose; and these characteristics appeared very distinctly in their visages. A carking forehead, and puckered, unhappy lips, made the son look older in expression than the father.

Rather dragged along, than supported by this worthy's arm, came Charity Green. There was something grieving, and, perhaps, as far as her humble and submissive nature permitted, indignant, in the latter's cast-down and thoughtful looks. The beauty of the flowers, the universal gaiety of the scene, evidently stirred no corresponding fancies in her mind. Perhaps she scarcely noticed them, absorbed in more engrossing ideas. Whatever their nature, she was permitted to indulge them at her leisure. Her companion very rarely addressed any observations to her; and when he did, they were of a querulous or snappish nature, not calculated to call forth any sustained or genial chat.

"I told you, you were not dressed fit to come! I told my mother so; but you never take my advice! What a figure you look among all these smart people!" Midas exclaimed, at last, in irrepressible vexation.

Charity thought, in her heart, that it was his own fault she was not dressed better,

but she replied, without any symptom of resentful feeling, "I told your mother so, too, but she would have me come. It is one comfort, though, that nobody notices me."

"What folly you talk!—they do; they must notice you going about with *us*, and people must wonder to see a relation of ours so shabbily dressed!"

"I do not like to take money which I have no means of repaying," said Charity, a tear secretly starting within her eyelashes.

"And that is what you call your pride, I suppose, and your wonderful being above an obligation!—I wonder you don't disdain almost to eat and drink at our expense," said Midas. "I know my mother would give you lots of things, if you would only wear them."

"I prefer the things you sometimes have made me a present of, Midas!—I do not like to be so fine that people look at me! I never could bear to be looked at," replied

Charity, with a gentleness that a little softened Midas himself.

"Pho! I never give you anything but things to wear in the house. I don't see why I should be at the whole expense, when my father and mother have nothing else to do with their money, unless it be to heap it on Ann, and that greedy fellow she has married," said Midas. "I believe my father will give away the whole capital of the firm at last, to please her and my mother's stupidity. How frightfully extravagant mother has grown! No wonder she never has a halfpenny to spend on you!"

"I am content, only I am sorry you think I look so shabby," replied Charity.

"It isn't on my own account—I have nothing to do with regulating your dress—you are free for me to wear any old rags you think proper!" said Midas, vexed with the very offencelessness of his victim. "But you always take up that whining tone to persuade people that you are dreadfully injured, and that everybody is maltreating

you. I am sure, if that is the kind of life you mean to lead your husband, he will have a fine time of it."

"I do not know that I shall ever be married," replied Charity, in an equable, melancholy tone, which startled even while it obscurely gratified Midas.

"You are ready to give me up then, I suppose, as soon as look at me?" he observed, without, however, looking at her. "Well, it is not quite polite to tell me so to my face—but I never thought you cared much for me. In fact, I should be sorry if—but I don't suppose you will break your heart if I were to die even—so there is no fear of your going desperate, and hanging or drowning yourself like some lovesick fool in a newspaper."

"No, there is no fear that I should do either of these things," said Charity, and her voice slightly quavered. "But it is not merely in newspapers—the poor creatures actually do it: they actually drown, they actually hang,—it is not merely a story

one reads! But I shall never, I hope, make a paragraph in a newspaper."

"Not even if you were to lose me?" said Midas, with a smile of great self-satisfaction, and with a look not exactly of "the love superior" of Milton's Adam, but with something perhaps akin to it, in the measureless conceit of the incredulity it expressed.

"Not even if I were to lose you," said Charity, calmly, and she felt calmly. Glimpses of this kind into the soul of the man she had so unfortunately entwined the freshest tendrils of her own around, not unfrequently of late gave her a degree of reconcilement to a fate she began to perceive was in store for her.

"Thank you for nothing!—Perhaps I may thank you for something some day!" replied Midas, strangely exasperated with an answer which yet chimed in very well with a secret hope of his own heart.

"It may be so, Midas; you will lose more in me than I shall in you," said Charity, with little visible emotion.

"Oh, I shall lose an immensity, shan't I? You are a tremendous fortune, are you not? A beauty of the first water? quite the glitter and show of a company wherever you go! Everybody admires you, don't they? and won't people say everywhere what a ruinous loss I have had of you?"

"I think not; most people, if they knew it, would think you well quit of me, most likely," replied Charity. "I sometimes think so myself. I am no tremendous fortune; I am not beautiful; I have no accomplishments: in company I am hardly noticed. But I am the same as I was—and I did not court you, Midas. However, if you do lose me, you need not be much vexed—it will be your own fault."

"Now, I suppose you think to come the saint and martyr over me?" said Midas, provoked as the wolf was by the lamb at the ford. "And the reason why you take the thing so coolly is, that you never cared for anything about me but my money, and you think you can get a good round sum from

me by bringing an action of breach of promise!"

"Do you say this, in earnest?" said Charity, turning very pale, for after all she cherished a confident credulity in her heart that would not suffer her to realize as yet the whole truth.

"Why, it almost seems so: you give me the go-by as quietly as one coach might another," replied Midas, with some confusion, some remorseful touch of nature in his breast.

"Money was never my idol: I never cared for money, Midas, and you know it," said Charity, in a tremulous voice. And she was silent for some time, until Midas crossly revived the conversation. "One might as well walk with a dumb person. Why don't you open your mouth now and then, just to let one know you have a tongue?"

"I do not know what to say. I was listening to the music, I think. Is that the band of the Horse Guards?" said Charity,

hastily, and, as it were, awakening from a revery.

"What stuff you talk! You seem to know nothing: a baby would know that it is an infantry band."

"I do not know much, indeed," she replied. "I was brought up always in the house; I never saw anybody except when poor mother kept the shop, and I served people when she was ill; and that was in such an out-of-the-way place, at Somers' Town."

"Then you did really once serve behind a chandler's counter?" said young Gullibull, in a tone of supreme disgust and contempt. "I advise you, as a friend, never to mention that again, if you don't wish to be scouted and scorned everywhere."

"I would not mention it to any one but you, Midas, who know it as well as I do myself. But we did not keep a chandler's shop; it was a small grocery."

"Pho! those wretched retail businesses may all be called chandlers' shops; but I

know you will come out with this some day before people!" exclaimed Midas, in great perturbation.

"If you mean those grand people belonging to your sister's family, you well know I never open my lips before them."

"You show some sense at least in that," replied the lover, a little mollified; but adding, with reviving asperity, "but the reason is, you know very well you cannot talk at all like a woman of the world, or as if you understood whether you were on your head or your heels. You sit like a person condemned to death, as if you had lost all connexion with what is going on about you. Just look, for example, at one of my sister's friends. What a wide-awake, charming woman Mrs. Sparkleton is! When will you be such a woman as that?"

"Never!" replied Charity, with a greatly more energetic emphasis than she usually put on her words.

"I believe you, my boy!" returned Midas, with triumphant facetiousness.

"But there is Ann, I do believe? only she has not got her fine blood-sucker of a lord with her. Another of them, I suppose!"

"Mrs. Sparkleton ought not—I mean, she will not be far off, then," said Charity, with a degree of anxiousness; but not of the kind for which Midas probably gave her credit.

"There she is! there's Lady Fitzhauton, John!" exclaimed Mrs. Gullibull, pointing out her daughter with her parasol, and hurrying on in a fever of maternal enthusiasm.

"Why don't you say 'There's Ann,' or, 'There's my daughter?' I almost thought you saw some of the old dowagers of countesses that haunt us now-a-days," replied the alderman. "But where the deuce is her husband, then? I don't like to see women flouncing about with strange men."

"Flouncing about! why, that's Lord Deville, Gullibull; I'll introduce you to him. I know him very well. I met him at Fitzhauton House this morning. Haven't you heard of him?"

"If I have, it was nothing to his good," said Gullibull, senior, rather grumblingly. "And, besides, I think, he is one of the Corn Law Repeal fellows—though I ain't sure—and that will ruin the corn trade."

"How can you make that appear? And, besides, you were always a Whig, you know, John," replied his wife.

"How will it ruin the corn trade? Why, if there are never high prices, when is the importer to make his great hits?" returned Mr. Gullibull. "I used to think very well of the Whigs, so far as they went, until they began to meddle with things they didn't understand—until——"

"They touched your own pocket, John; say the truth at once," observed his spouse. "You used to clamour as loudly as anybody for the repeal, till old Rustisaw gammoned you it would ruin the trade. You must take smaller profits and sell more, like other people, that's all. There are lots of people, I can tell you, will be glad enough to eat more than they did."

"You ain't quite a fool, old girl, after all," conceded Gullibull, senior, with an affection and good humour in his looks and tones which disarmed the expression of any virulence. "But, perhaps, I can do better with other things than ever I did, in my best years, with corn. That depends on the wind and weather; but iron and earth don't."

"I am sure I wish you luck in your new specs., John, though they do swallow up money wonderfully," replied Mrs. Gullibull; but she had been too long accustomed to place implicit faith in her husband's skill in business to doubt his success in whatever he undertook, for a moment, seriously. "Midas and old Rustisaw are always harping against railways; but I should think you knew better than either of them, or all the world put together—if all the world were as much against, as they are for, your side of the question."

Old Rustisaw was the chief clerk in the house of Gullibull and Co., and during thirty

years had constantly remonstrated against all his employer had undertaken in the way of speculation, in vain. But his business-habits and integrity retained him in the favour of his master, who, perhaps, moreover, with his natural good sense, felt that he needed a drag-chain occasionally on his wheel.

Lady Fitzhauton had by this time recognised the group, and contrasting their appearance mentally with that of her high-bred companion, she felt—yes, she felt as if she would have been glad to avoid them had it been possible. It was not possible; and in a few instants Mrs. Gullibull was in the height of her glory, introducing her husband and son to Lord Deville, in a loud voice, and with a pomp and flutter that almost amounted to a proclamation.

"Where's your good man, Ann?" was Gullibull senior's first observation after the performance of this ceremony.

"Lord Fitzhauton is—he is somewhere in the gardens, papa, but I don't know

where—with Mrs. Sparkleton," said Lady Fitzhauton, colouring. "They have really quite cut us; yet we are not such very bad company either, one would think."

"It's the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton; you know her, John, *I* know!" said Mrs. Gullibull, rather roguishly. "They have quite a flirtation, my lord, and I can only look on and be jealous, to see them huddling together in corners, and talking their secrets over!"

"Pho, don't believe her! Mrs. G.'s not the woman to take things so easy—but Mrs. S. has some money she don't know what to do with, and wants me to put it out to the best advantage," said the merchant, laughing heartily. "I don't think Mrs. Sparkleton can wait till you hop the perch, old woman, and some young fellow will be stepping in meantime and carrying off the prize."

"I'll go and look for my brother-in-law, and tell him where we are," said Midas, relinquishing Miss Green's arm rather un-

ceremoniously. "Where will you be? Will you go and look at the prizes, and I'll bring them there?"

"And be quick, for I think I've seen enough of the affair.—We have plenty of this sort of thing at home in the conservatory," said Mr. Gullibull. "Come along, Betsy! which is the way?"

"Will this young lady—I beg pardon, I did not hear the name—accept my arm in the meantime?" said Lord Deville, with the courtesy of manner which breeding confers, like the polish on marble, even on the coldest selfishness.

"I'll take it instead, if your lordship pleases, and she can go with her uncle," interposed Mrs. Gullibull, resolutely seizing the unoffered limb. "Charity's no company—she likes to keep her words to herself, as if they were something precious, which I am sure they are not."

"Come along, Charity, then; a silent woman is at all events a variety," said the alderman, and drawing Charity's arm in

his own, with a jolly laugh, he took the precedence with as much sang-froid as if it were his by prescriptive right. Mrs. Gullibull, however, apologised for the rudeness to Viscount Deville, who, seeing that there was no help for it, resigned himself to her accompaniment.

Meanwhile, Midas proceeded on his search as fast as his tightly fitting garb permitted him, or as he thought dignified. These reservations of course permitted no indecent haste. Moreover, in spite of his natural stiffness, he wished to assume the lounging gait of a man perfectly fashionable and perfectly at his ease. He even whistled occasionally, to show how little he cared for the gaily-garbed people he encountered, and who, he thought, looked at him as at some strange animal turned loose. Midas either had, or persuaded himself he had, a great contempt for every species of aristocracy but that of money. Nevertheless, there was no one had a meaner reverence in actual practice for the distinctions rank

confers; no one stood in more nervous dread of its observation and ridicule; no one more earnestly desired to enter as a denizen into its charmed circle. Even while doing his best to parade indifference, or rather contempt for all he saw, no one could possibly feel more disconcerted and vexed with the staring observation this very conduct attracted to him. Young ladies quizzed him, dowagers stared at him through their eye-glasses, till he became as red and hot as a haymaker in August.

Meanwhile, he could not anywhere discern the object of his search, although he had a secret opinion that he should be very welcome when he came upon it. To say truth, Mrs. Sparkleton had discerned the whole party at their first entrance into the gardens, but at a safe distance—an advantage which she improved by instantly turning off Lord Fitzhauton in another direction. "O, lud, though I don't much care to listen to such high-flown poesy as you are treating me with—let us escape if we can!

Yonder come alderman Gullibull and his frau—I beg your pardon, I really forgot—and there is that odious son of theirs who, if such a personage could be in love, I do believe would have me think he is so with me!"

This was quite enough for Lord Fitzhauton, who gladly hurried his fascinating companion from the point of danger. They were soon once more immersed in a conversation in which sentimental reminiscences mingled somewhat perilously with the laughing gossip and chit-chat of the moment. Mrs. Sparkleton knew well how to amuse, and she was determined on this occasion to be very amusing. But she persuaded herself that she desired only to let Lord Fitzhauton experience some sentiment of regret as a punishment for his mercenary preference of the rich heiress. What other motive could she have, since in her heart she condemned the man on whom she now displayed her fascinations, as selfish, ungrateful, incapable of a deep or lasting feeling of any sort?

Lord Fitzhauton always thought his pleasure paramount to every other consideration,—and he had a great opinion of his own prudence and strength of character. His principles were not of any adamantine fixedness, and not at all severe in theory or application. He enjoyed himself at present, and that was always a sufficient reason for him to do anything. He could not see the immense harm in exchanging a few vivacious compliments with a handsome woman, who seemed so well pleased to receive them, and repaid them with the most fascinating smiles and coquetry. As to his wife, he scarcely thought of her, unless when Mrs. Sparkleton made an occasional satirical allusion to the discordancy very evident between them, or to her family connexions.

Mrs. Sparkleton had long been determined to ascertain to a nicety how much ground she had lost since a period when she well remembered that, but for some fortunate chances—though she did not think them so at the time—she might very possibly

have been seriously compromised in a flirtation with Lord Fitzhauton. These were, that the colonel, her late spouse, in the course of his residence at Paris, in the very height of the season there, suddenly fancied that it would be good for his gout to spend the spring at Nice, and Lord Fitzhauton was compelled, by the involvement of his affairs, to return to England. There he married, and Colonel Sparkleton soon after ventured to return and die in peace, after making a satisfactory will, at his own seat in Surrey.

But neither Mrs. Sparkleton nor her gallant companion had calculated with sufficient exactness how much easier it is to assign limits to intentions than to keep them. Perhaps they had not taken into the reckoning all the forces that were likely to hurry them beyond their aims. Lord Fitzhauton had not fairly estimated the effect, on a man of his temperament, of the music, of the beauty of the day, the gay colouring of every object around, of youth and high

spirits, the charms of a brilliant woman, piqued to display them to the utmost—of the vexation he experienced from reflections on the position of his domestic affairs. He felt that it would be gratifying to Mrs. Sparkleton to know that he was unhappy in them—not unfrequently he thought he was so, and he now sought the opportunity to communicate the fact to her. Mrs. Sparkleton had not calculated that the feeling she had formerly entertained for Lord Fitzhauton was by no means so thoroughly extinguished but that it might revive from its ashes. She only intended to show a becoming sensibility for his sorrows—that she cherished not the slightest resentment about any former matters, and so to demonstrate a present indifference. Both played their parts till both become a little too much in earnest.

Fitzhauton related his sufferings from the purse-proud vulgarity of his new family; from his wife's petulance and peevish overbearingness; until he persuaded himself verily, that he was an exceedingly ill-used

and oppressed individual. Mrs. Sparkleton expressed a feeling appreciation, a warm commiseration, which heightened every sentiment of regret and indignation in the young nobleman's heart. He assured her, that he had never unbosomed himself to any one in the world as he had to her; in fact, that she was the only woman that had ever won his confidence; that he should be most miserable, abandoned by every consolation, if she did not promise still to continue his friend, his dear friend, his dearest friend!

"Do you think, Fitzhauton, that I can ever be anything else to you? But, no, I cannot be *that!*—your wife must be that—at least she ought to be," said Mrs. Sparkleton, with real emotion. "If I had been your wife, it would have been different, of course; but then, perhaps, I might have merited a warmer sentiment! Let us say no more—but *friends*, I fear, we can never be."

"Not friends!—not friends, even?" said Fitzhauton, with the passionate vehemence

of one accustomed, from infancy, to meet with no obstacle sufficiently strong to curb his impetuous will. In fact, the only really potent curbs on the passions of men must exist in their own hearts and in principle. Laws are feeble to avert, they are only strong to avenge.

"When I demand only friendship, Geraldine! Oh, you never had even that feeling for me! But we will not part; I will not suffer you to leave me, until you have promised, pledged yourself, to grant me the only consolation I can hope for now!"

"An acquaintance, a visitor, I may be, but—how can you expect anything more?" replied Mrs. Sparkleton. "How *can* you expect it, when I feel more than ever the necessity of breaking the slight connexion which still exists between us?"

"What necessity?—Oh, yes, I comprehend!—you intend to marry Deville!" said Fitzhauton, with great bitterness.

"Who has the right to hinder me, if I do?" replied Mrs. Sparkleton. "Certainly

not you, Fitzhauton!—nor even to be in the slightest degree vexed at it. Beside, don't you men hold that what's your wives' is yours? And surely when I am identified with your friend, you can conclude that you enjoy some portion of the friendship of which he ought else, I suppose, in a less metaphysical point of view, to enjoy the monopoly."

"Deville is my friend, I own," said Lord Fitzhauton, with some reluctance. "At least, people call him so. Yes, they ask me at the clubs, 'How is your *friend*, Lord Deville?'—But I very frequently don't know, and much oftener I don't care. It's only a disagreeable way people have of mouthing out a simple question—though it is a thousand to one that nobody wants to know, whoever asks it! Why do you want to marry that man?—I know you do not love him; he is not your sort at all. Why do you encourage him?"

"Who would have thought that Miss Gullibull was your sort, Fitzhauton!—But

one's taste changes: I don't pride myself on remaining inflexibly fixed in any set of opinions—nor anybody else of sense in these times."

"So you really do love him? you really will have him?—you may keep your friendship then for him too, indeed!" said Fitz hauton, angrily.

"Why, don't you think he is an excellent match?" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, calmly. "But I forget, he is your *friend!*—you will not say a word against him, so I need never ask your opinion."

"But don't you know his character? what he has done?"

"But he has repaired it now with such admirable skill that no one can even tell where the cracks were!"

"I see plainly that you are exceedingly fond of him."

"I shall be, of course, when I am married. You can dote on your wife, you know, by way of retaliation!" said the lady, with vivacity; but she recollected the

fickle and wilful character of the young peer, and continued, with a playful smile, that seemed to throw a dash of similar satire on what she had previously said—"The next news you will tell me is, that I am passionately attached to my other adorer, Gullibull and Co., junior. That is the proper style, I believe."

"Well, what do you really think of *him?*" said Lord Fitzhauton, unable, in spite of his vexation, to help being pleased with this re-assurance.

"What do *you* think of him?—I should be a relation, I imagine, if I married your brother-in-law, should I not?"

"I disdain and disown him, a narrow-minded peddling huckster! His father, who is as rude and unceremonious as a bear, without caring who likes or who dislikes it, is a thousand times more of a gentleman than he is! But what *do* you think of him, Mrs. Sparkleton?"

"I?—I think that he has a great deal of money; or will have some day—and

you know one will do anything for money!"

"One can't love for money; I have found that out," said the earl. "But what do you really think of him?"

"Well—I think that he has a good tailor."

"Then I won't be afraid of him," said Fitzhauton, laughing. "I see you comprehend him. And as to Deville, you don't seem in any hurry to strike a bargain with him, and I don't wonder at it if you knew as much of him as I do. He is not such a saint as he makes people believe!—Well, are we the friends we were? or am I altogether alone and deserted in the world?"

This was a very affecting idea—and the band was at the moment playing a very tender air of Bellini's, in the distance, for they were now almost alone in a remote path bordering along a fruit wall. Like all women of great vivacity of temperament, Mrs. Sparkleton was a creature of impulse, and Lord Fitzhauton knew it very well, as

he extended his hand to her in entreaty. Tears rushed to her eyes as she took it, and replied in a low, earnest tone, "What folly!—But would you were deserted by all the world, and alone—and you should see who would be found faithful amidst the false!"

Lord Fitzhauton pressed the hand to his heart, and would perhaps have sealed this judicious arrangement with a more daring testimony of gratitude, if he had not luckily observed the approach of a personage who might have proved an inconvenient record of the fact. It was Mr. Gullibull and Co., junior, as Mrs. Sparkleton designated him.

"I must pretend to be doing something—but pray don't be jealous, however I amuse myself with that pragmatical tailor's wand!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, and stooping to a bed of rare flowers, she plucked one of the finest, and began quite coolly gathering some mignionette to encircle it, heedless of the understood compact between the hor-

ticultural society and its visitors, and pretending not to observe Midas's approach.

"Thieves, thieves! I have caught you, you naughty woman, and I will go and inform against you!" exclaimed Midas, seizing Mrs. Sparkleton by the arm with graceful familiarity, and shaking her with a violence intended to be playful, but which really both hurt and offended her.

"A policeman in plain clothes! I thought you were so—but pray don't ill-treat me, as I make no resistance!" she said, with disguised anger and contempt, and clutching her arm from his grasp. "I declare, Mr. Gullibull, you have really hurt me—you have indeed!"

"Come along to the station-house then, quietly; you shall link arms with me, or I will handcuff you: I have you safe now," said the gallant citizen, drawing Mrs. Sparkleton's hand by sheer force into his arm. "Come along, brother constable; or you can keep a look-out behind, to see that no other pick-flowers try to rescue her."

Lord Fitzhauton looked for an instant as if far more inclined to attempt the rescue himself, and that in a very unceremonious manner. But he managed to suppress the impulse, more especially as the captive gave him a glance that seemed to counsel forbearance. "Well, but at least I will not be taken with the stolen goods in my possession," she said, throwing the nosegay down. "And now where am I to be taken to?"

"The Mansion House!" returned Midas, pursuing his vein of agreeable raillery. "There is my late Lord Mayor, Gullibull, waiting to give you your month on the mill, perhaps more, being an old offender, for no doubt you will be recognised as such."

"Well, I believe people mostly are when once they are found out," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "Take me to judgment, for I would much rather be in jail than——." An aside smile to Lord Fitzhauton finished the sentence, not greatly to the credit of the pleasure bestowed by Midas's society, and Mrs. Sparkleton suffered her new beau to

lead her on. The former one raised the discarded nosegay, and scenting it almost as if he kissed it, walked on beside her in silence, while Midas went through a series of observations and pantomimic actions, meant to express that he was a policeman dragging off a poor woman, detected thieving, to a magistrate's office. A gay and gallant fancy, admirably worked out, and watched with silent but unutterable contempt in its development by the noble brother-in-law.

Mrs. Sparkleton had her own reasons for desiring to keep well with the junior partner in the firm of Gullibull, Gullibull, and Co. Even as a mere matter of amusement, it diverted her to witness the dancing of her civic admirer in the chains, which, at leisure moments, she had employed herself in forging and throwing over him. But she greatly despised, and perhaps at this moment hated him. Still she knew, or thought, that he might be useful to her in her business speculations, since it was plain

to her perspicacity, that young Gullibull began to imagine their interests had something in common. This notion diverted her, and gave her at the same time an engine of power, which she was willing to use, without entertaining the least apprehension of any peril to herself from the machinery, or of injuring it. Mrs. Sparkleton was not so believing as poor Charity Green, nor indeed had she the like reason to be credulous to appearances. She knew that she was rich, brilliantly beautiful— and Charity knew that herself was the reverse. The disinterested attachment in one case could scarcely be doubted — in the other, admitted of the interpretation, which Mrs. Sparkleton's knowledge of the world, and contemptuous estimate of Midas's character, suggested to her in spite of her vanity. In what a dark dream do we grope about, we mortals, grasping at shadows! In what an unreal world do we all live, deeming that what seems is! Even the most sagacious, the most disabused of the

crafty phantasmagoria of the delusions of existence continue at times to credit them!

Mrs. Sparkleton had no such German reverie in her head, but she did not wish to entangle herself in any way awkwardly with her intended machine, and therefore she discouraged the very obvious intention of Midas to get her alone with him. Under pretence of hurrying her along, as a brutal policeman ought to do—which he assured her he was—he tried to outwalk Fitzhauton, and leave him behind. But it could not be; the peer would not lend himself to the manœuvre, nor the lady either. "Stop! you put me quite out of breath!" she said, pausing. "It is as good as acting a charade, but it is quite as fatiguing. Beside, I don't want people to think I am actually in custody."

"Take my arm, then, and let the policeman go on and tell the worthy magistrate we are coming," said Lord Fitzhauton. Midas thought him the most unnatural specimen of a brother-in-law that had ever

escaped the lightnings at this moment, and looked as if he thought so, without in the slightest degree disturbing the purpose of his foiler. But unfortunately for Mrs. Sparkleton and her shared reluctance to be resigned to a *tête-à-tête* with the younger Gullibull, a fourth personage suddenly appeared on the scene, and destroyed the triangular balance.

CHAPTER XII.

We begin a new chapter with this new personage, not because we would have the reader imagine that some one of consequence to us or our story is at hand, but because we think it a convenient spot to stop and bait at. Having refreshed our pen with a moment's rest, and a good drink of ink, we proceed, premising that the reader is not, by reason of our protest, to imagine that the new introduction is a superfluity which both he and our narrative could very well do without. Unimportant personages and events not unfrequently are the occasion of others of the utmost importance. Who that saw the honest Corsican attorney, Charles

Buonaparte, going to church with his bride, Letitia, would have predicated the battle of Waterloo from that inoffensive circumstance?

"Ah, Fitzhauton!—My dear lord, how d'ye do?—you are the very man I wanted to see!—Mrs. Sparkleton!—have I really the exquisite happiness to meet with you?" said a voice from a small but exceedingly well dressed little figure of a gentleman, with a romantic Byronian collar turned down, and a pale little whey-and-Werther visage as little like the Alcinous beauty of the prototype's head as might be.

"You meet with me! I cannot say for the rest of so fine a salutation," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, recognising in the person who addressed her a specimen of by no means a rare tribe—the magnus Apollo of a fashionable coterie of the hour—one of those tomtit warblers that every now and then—in this general noonday silence of the great songsters—utter their faint little chirrupings, are applauded as songbirds of

the finest note for an instant—the next are utterly forgotten. The only points necessary to constitute poets of this order are a good social position, and an incapability of writing anything original. Consequently they always imitate, though unconsciously, (one of the characteristics of the species being a firm belief that all the great bards are poetasters in comparison with themselves,) and thus seldom write so badly but that they may delude themselves and the foolish people necessary to compose a coterie, into the persuasion that they are poets. Mr. Hercules Twittlewit (that was the little gentleman's name) was the darling of an influential circle of fashionable literati who had pronounced him a marvellous genius. Twittlewit had been at least three times in as many years hailed the Byron of the day—had three times in that period been forgotten, but had just published a work which was likely to revive all his glories. It was a novel—for, in compliance with the taste of the times, he had descended from

his Pegasus to the common earth, a libel on all his acquaintance, and a very dull and stupid one, but not the less eagerly read on the score of its merits in the former capacity.

Mr. Twittlewit, it seemed, anxiously desired to speak in private with Lord Fitzhauton, on "business of the utmost importance," so that, after salutations were duly exchanged, Mrs. Sparkleton could not well avoid walking on with Midas Gullibull, after receiving his lordship's promise, which she did not doubt he would keep, to rejoin them as soon as possible.

The inconsistencies of human nature have often been the subject of severe comment with sages and philosophers, who cannot for the life of them understand why man, being intended to be man, has been made so subject to imperfections of every species. They forget that their theories might possibly, indeed, have contrived a nobler being, but not the one in question. For example, is it not strange to see a man weary heaven and earth, and his friends and himself, in

pursuit of a woman whom, when he obtains, he very often slights and contemns—will scarcely take the trouble to put her shawl on her shoulders for her when they are returning to the delights of a *tête-à-tête* from an evening party? And yet it was certainly a little singular, that as soon as Midas Gullibull had achieved his purpose and great desire to obtain a private audience of Mrs. Sparkleton, he repented heartily his chance success, and wished himself almost anywhere but where he was.

The favour he had hitherto experienced from the brilliant widow, and the great opinion he had of his own personal good looks, wealth, and expectations, might give him, one would have thought, some reasonable grounds for confidence. Mrs. Sparkleton seemed in possession of every quality that could allure an aspiring plebeian—rank, fashion, éclat—circumstances which Gullibull, junior, affected to hold in very slight estimation, but in reality regarded with mingled envy and awe. Above all, she

was considered to be exceedingly rich, and if possessing a large income, and living up to twice as much, could make her so, so she was. Midas had calculated accurately, in many laborious meditations, and even with the assistance of an old retired attorney, his godfather, whom he craftily got to deliver an opinion without revealing the parties, what he should most likely have to pay for breaking his secret plight to Charity Green. He had weighed to the utmost scruple what influence the facts of the case might have on the feelings of a jury, and the advantages so far outbalanced the possible losses, that there seemed no solid reason why he should not make an immediate proposal to Mrs. Sparkleton. Such had been his intention several times lately, but somehow or another, whatever opportunities occurred, his heart failed him always at the precise instant when he most needed its valuable assistance.

With all the truly plebeian, because ignorant and unmeaning, contempt for birth

and aristocratic distinctions, which he strove to persuade himself he cherished, Midas had hitherto always felt embarrassed and overawed by their actual presence. There is nothing between servility and downright impudence in the composition of the veritable snob towards superiorities of all kinds; and alas! we fear that Midas was one in grain. It may be, however, that we do not do justice altogether to his motives; it may be that a tinge of remorse, some hesitation to commit himself irretrievably in the wrong he meditated, might have influence in keeping him silent, and in flushing his naturally high complexion. For silent and flushed he continued until Mrs. Sparkleton herself was obliged to commence the conversation. But she did so in a manner that would have seemed to few gentlemen, about to pop the question, a desirable opening. "I suppose you are not long from the city, Mr. Gullibull? Pray, can you tell me how things are going in the share market? I

mean is everything as prosperous as it was the other day? Is it a good time to invest one's money in railroad shares?"

So far from being disconcerted at this business-like commencement, Midas seized upon it as an excellent means to discover what Mrs. Sparkleton really possessed, for he was too sagacious to wish to confide his happiness altogether to the assurances of report.

"It is a very good time, at least my father says so, and he *ought* to know—for those who can act largely on the market,—but it is of no use putting in very small sums now that the great capitalists are all at work," he replied. "But what makes such a west-end lady as you are, Mrs. Sparkleton, ask that?"

"I'll tell you—in confidence—*I want to know!*" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with jeering solemnity. "But that is not my only reason. I have five or six thousand pounds I don't know what to do with—in fact, I could make it ten thousand, and

your father speaks so highly of railways as an investment, that I think I cannot do better than embark my little surplus in them."

"Surplus!" mused Midas, silently excited, then adding aloud, "If it really is money lying idle beside you—money you don't want for any other purpose—of course you would not think of touching your property—anticipating your income in any manner?"

"Oh, no, I have enough to live upon without it."

"And she lives at the rate of five or six thousand a year!—the whole neighbourhood agrees in that," mused Midas.

"Well?" said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"In that case, in that case, my dear ma'am, I should most strenuously advise you, in spite of all my father says, to have nothing to do with such uncertain speculations!" replied Midas. "You may depend it is just the same in England now as it was in the time of the South Sea scheme. Mr.

Rustisaw, our chief clerk, pointed out to me an account of it, the other day, and I declare if you put Railways instead of the great bubble of those days, you have the whole thing complete!"

"Pooh, nonsense, Mr. Gullibull, your father is one of the most experienced merchants in the whole city—he must know better than you," said Mrs. Sparkleton, much vexed at this abrupt pull of the check-string to her hobby. "I hope you will not consider me impertinent, but I declare that I shall go altogether by his advice, invest or not invest. Why, are you not over head and ears in such things yourselves?"

"My father is the master in his own concern—I am only the junior partner—but I can only say, Mrs. Sparkleton, that if I were yours ——"

"How! my master?—you, Mr. Gullibull?"

"I mean, if I had control over your actions," said Midas, very bewitchingly, while Mrs. Sparkleton bridled her fine head

scornfully in the air, like a thorough-bred disdaining the rein, "I would not let you be led away by my father's extravagant fancies and example."

"What would you have me do with my money then?"

"Start a Soap Manufactory," replied Midas, with enthusiasm. "I know a most eligible chance—a concern that has extended itself so far beyond its capital that it must take in a monied partner—it need only be a sleeping one, you know. Do but let me have the investment of your six thousand pounds! Six thousand pounds will exactly do!—I cannot promise you such a large per-centage as father fancies he shall get for you—and which he will, as much as he will get the cash up again that he threw down the Mexican mines—but it's safe and sure. You need not go to bed every night with a headache about your money!"

"Nevertheless, the Soap Manufactory shall not take me in; I prefer the chance

of much to the certainty of little. Besides, I don't care whether I lose the money or not," said Mrs. Sparkleton, carelessly, but we cannot add that she spoke the truth. Gullibull, Junior, however, firmly believed that a fine lady had not sufficient sense to deceive in such a manner, and his passion was greatly increased by an apprehension which at this moment formed a most powerful confluence with it. It hurried him considerably beyond the safe depth in which he was so judiciously paddling.

"You would care for money though, if you had a husband and family, Mrs. Sparkleton!" he said, with an emphatic tenderness, which at once vexed its object, and almost, irresistibly, forced her to burst out laughing. But she managed to restrain herself, and replied, quite demurely:—

"Well, if I had such a group of helpless individuals looking at me for their daily bread, I might perhaps, as you say, feel the necessity of some little retrenchment to keep the poor souls from the workhouse.

But all prudential speculations on the subject are obviated, for you know I have not!"

She looked so beautiful and charmingly gay at the admirer as she spoke, that Midas, who could not discern the satire that lurked in the corner of her smile, ventured to reply with ardour, "But you *might*, if you chose, for I would marry you, Mrs. Sparkleton!"

Mrs. Sparkleton was embarrassed for an instant—only an instant. "A good number of people tell me so; there is Viscount Deville, for instance," she said, quite calmly. "One understands that sort of jesting; and everybody knows, that as the burned child dreads the fire, I shall keep my distance from matrimony in future."

"I thought you wouldn't have that old fellow, although he is a lord; he is far too old for any woman in her senses to take a fancy to," said Midas, who, not living habitually in the great world, had not heard until now of this formidable rival, and was greatly alarmed at his

tidings. "Besides, I dare say, if the truth were known, he has very little money. Very few of these swellish noblemen have; they are generally head over ears with the Jews, and ought to be sent to the treadmill as impostors if they had their due. What do you call him? I have no doubt he is some pampered aristocrat living on the taxes, eating us all up, and lazying existence away at the West-end, in their white waistcoats and gloves! I have no doubt he is!"

"I don't think he is, however," quietly responded the hearer. "I am sure he has no place, and I suppose he pays the Income Tax whether he has any occasion or not."

"Then you won't accept my offer, Mrs. Sparkleton?" said Midas, very sullenly, and still more abruptly.

"No; I cannot join in any soap manufacturing business just at present. I really have no more spare cash to throw away, at this moment; for thrown away you seem to think it is," replied Mrs. Sparkleton.

"No; I don't mean the soap speculation.

I mean—— But I'll write you a letter to explain myself, so that there can be no mistake," said Midas, rather confusedly. "Will you promise to receive a letter if I send you one, and upon your solemn word of honour as a lady, never to mention the contents to any one?"

"Certainly; and will give it my best attention; that will be by much the best," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, eagerly. She began to feel annoyed, and anxious to get out of the situation—as our republican neighbours phrase it. And she gave the required assent, with such a supremely well performed unconsciousness of look that, without in the slightest degree compromising herself, Gullibull, junior, was at liberty to conclude that he had broken the ice, without incurring any danger of slipping under water. Indeed, he was rather pleased that he had not explicitly committed himself; that it was still in his power to retract, if, on mature consideration, he should feel inclined. His nature was strongly opposed to

everything decisive; it was timorous and evasive in a singular degree.

Besides, at this moment they arrived at the place of rendezvous, and perceived in a group, inspecting a beautiful variety of plants and flowers in a marquee, first, the alderman and his niece, then Lord Deville with Mrs. Gullibull, leaning her goodly weight on one of his arms while Lady Fitz-hauton was yawning at the flowers, and dangling at the other. The alderman was good-naturedly attempting to amuse his niece, by inquiring if she could copy a rare dahlia which he pointed out to her, in wax, "as good as nature." Mrs. Gullibull was talking, commenting, laughing, boasting of the infinitely better specimens of everything she had at home in her conservatory, to the great annoyance and affected amusement of Lord Deville, and the more sincere satisfaction of numerous bystanders, who not unfrequently darted looks of wondering query at the group. But such is the omnipotent power of opinion that, after ascer-

taining it was in reality the fashionable Viscount who 'squired her, most people concluded Mrs. Gullibull was some foreign lady of distinction, or, at worst, an Irish peeress. Her loud, fearless tones, and independent judgment on all she saw—sometimes including the dress and appearance of strangers mingling and passing in the groups, were therefore not pronounced vulgar, as they would have been, if who she was had been known. Deville, in fact, saw that his only resource was to look and behave as if he were proud instead of ashamed of his company, and thus he at once won Mrs. Gullibull's heart, and confirmed the spectators in their error.

Charity Green was the first that noticed the approach of the expected truants, and a faint flush visited her pale cheek when she saw by whom Midas was accompanied. She whispered to her uncle, who turned round instantly, with evident satisfaction, and exclaiming with a boisterous hilarity which attracted general notice, "What, bonny

Maggie Lauder! give us a paw!" he clutched Mrs. Sparkleton's delicate hand in both his, and shook it for several minutes. This was a familiar cognomen he had bestowed upon her, (she was a great favourite with old Gullibull,) in consequence of the satisfaction she gave him on one occasion when she had managed to accompany his singing of the old Scotch rant, on the piano, in spite of his independence of time and tune. A feat that no other mortal ever before accomplished, and we fear never could again.

"I have brought her before your worship, Mr. Alderman, for 'stealing flowers," said Midas, excellently sustaining his character. "I caught her in the act, and I think you cannot do less than give her a month of it in the House of Correction."

"At Gullibull Villa then—I'll punish her there in style!—if she will come and stay a month with us!—But haven't you any witnesses, Mat, for I shan't condemn on your evidence only?" replied the alderman, en-

tering into the humour of the affair with more wit than his son had devised it. Mat was the name he always gave Midas, by way of christianizing it, and indeed he never comprehended why he had been called such a strange name at all, except that his wife assured him it was "slap-up and foreign," and that the rich old gentleman who stood his boy's godfather had set his heart on calling him so.

"Yes, I will go with your worship, most decidedly, in preference," said Mrs. Sparkleton, and with pretended playfulness, but real disgust and weariness, she loosened her arm from Midas's too close and too familiar pressure, and put it in the alderman's. The latter hugged it to him in great triumph, laughing heartily at his son, who imagined he displayed much liveliness and pleasantry in two or three darting attempts which he made to regain his captive, parried very dexterously by the alderman's thick walking stick. Charity Green stooped, apparently to look more closely at

the flower which she was to copy in wax, and a tear fell from her eye upon it, unheeded and unnoticed by all present—unless it might be by some one of that invisible police who may very possibly attend exhibitions, as well as more secluded scenes, to report the doings of mankind.

Nearly at the same instant, Mrs. Gullibull, who observed the arrival with great satisfaction, relinquished her hold of Deville's arm, and gallantly pushed her way through the thronging crowds of sightseers, until she reached her husband. The whole family had surely a genius for acting: it pleased Mrs. Gullibull to perform the "jealous wife," on this occasion—her first appearance in the character. "Well, I'm sure! pretty doings these! making off with one's own husband before one's very eyes!" And laughing with loud cordiality and stunning jey, she wrung Mrs. Sparkleton's hand as if se had not seen her for several yea rs, and had lighted on her in the desert of Sahara.

Lord Deville whispered a few words to

Lady Fitzhauton, which made her toss her head and colour, and then they joined the newly found group.

"What have you done with Fitzhauton, Mrs. Sparkleton? where is he?" said Lady Fitzhauton, with a degree of judicial haughtiness and interrogatory in her tone which stirred the vivacious blood of Mrs. Sparkleton, in secret, but brought only an amiable smile to her lips. At least it required some depth of penetration to discern the disdain and defiance lurking in it.

"I left him—I don't know where! Your brother has gossiped me out of all recollection of anything," she replied.

"Gock, Mrs. Sparkleton, you make all the women jealous — we shall have both mother and daughter going off in the same fit in a minute! The green-eyed monster has got hold of them both!" said the alderman, delightedly rubbing his hands. "Look at Ann!—just look at her eyes!—Don't you see how green they are, my lord—I forget your name?"

"Perfect emeralds!" replied the refined tactician appealed to.

"He met with a friend, and stopped to talk with him, about business. It wasn't a lady, so don't look so black, Ann!—and I took the opportunity to march off with Mrs. Sparkleton," said Midas.

Almost on the word, Lord Fitzhauton appeared, looking very vexed and annoyed, but closely followed up by the not-easily-to-be-shaken-off Twittlewit. Exceedingly annoyed, in the first place, by the thought that Midas was probably engaged in prosecuting his attentions to Mrs. Sparkleton, Fitzhauton was also wearied to death by his companion, and with the nonsensical nature of the business he had alleged to gain his ear. Rather than not be thought to have composed a very formidable libel indeed—or perhaps he had been jested with by some of his acquaintance—but Twittlewit announced that one of the personages of "his book" had declared he would horsewhip him for the manner in which he had been treated

in it. Under these circumstances, he entreated Lord Fitzhauton to promise that—"if anything should happen"—he would officiate as his friend on the occasion.

"You had better not have me, for I'll be hanged if I don't get one or the other of you shot, you are such a pair of confounded bores—one with his poetry, and the other with his stupid curiosities," said Lord Fitzhauton. "I warn you, I won't leave the ground till you are both, if possible, sent to glory."

"Perhaps nothing will happen;—but will you?" said Twittlewit, quite beseechingly.

"Well, but don't bore me about it, till you get your horsewhipping," said the projected second, laughing outright, in spite of his vexation. But in vain he tried to shift the conversation, or to get rid of his companion. The apprehended duel formed a good introduction to an elaborate defence of the work in question, changing by no very fine shades into the warmest self-eulogy, and a very minute account of the

various beauties in which it abounded. Listening, or rather seeming to listen, to this description—for he could not get away, his arm being firmly linked in Twittlewit's—Fitzhauton arrived.

"Well, how did you *two* enjoy yourselves? *We* have enjoyed ourselves wonderfully!" said Lady Fitzhauton to her lord, with a disdainful glance.

"It is indeed a very fine show apparently, this year," said Deville.

"I don't know. I scarcely noticed anything. Twittlewit may really well consider his novel a 'stunner,'" replied Fitzhauton.

Twittlewit exchanged salutes with Lord Deville, and stared at the Gullibulls. Mrs. Gullibull inquired, in a very audible whisper, of her son-in-law, who he was, and he replied, by introducing him. "Oh, it is the celebrated Mr. Twittlewit—the great poet, or novelist—which are we to call you now, Hercules?—let me recommend

him to your acquaintance, — my wife's mother, Mrs. Gullibull."

"I'm quite delighted to see you, sir," replied the lady, extending her ever-ready hand at once, while Fitzhauton, delighted to be relieved of his bore, turned to see if there were any possibility of retrieving Mrs. Sparkleton. The refined Hercules, with a stare of surprise at so sudden a cordiality, put the tip of one of his fingers on Mrs. Gullibull's glove, with a touch meant to freeze. But it failed. "I was just thinking what rum names they do give to flowers," said Mrs. Gullibull; "but as you are a scholar sort of a gentleman, you will be able to give me a touch of their proper *pronounciation*. What's that, for a beginning?"

Twittlewit found himself seized and captured even as he himself had lately made a prey; but as he luckily at the instant recollected the association of the Gullibull name with great wealth, he resigned himself more easily than one would have expected, to his task.

"That, mem? That is a ranunculus."

"A ranuncūlus?" repeated Mrs. Gullibull, merely transposing the accent of her tutor to the wrong syllable.

"Let us go, there is nothing I hate more than being annoyed with the names of things," said Fitzhauton, peevishly; and with a look at Mrs. Sparkleton, which said as plainly as words could, "Won't you take my arm again?"

"I want to show alderman Gullibull my carnations—and to get out of this crowd," said Mrs. Sparkleton, without seeming to understand. "So we will head the procession, and be off together."

"I shall be quite jealous if you do—I am already," said Mrs. Gullibull, desisting from her botanical studies, and playfully shaking her plump clenched fist.

"You could not hurt her with that lump of fat, if you hit her, Betsy; but I'll take care you don't while I am by to see fair play," returned the alderman.

"I'm sure, mamma, if anybody ought to

be jealous, I ought," said Lady Fitzhauton. "Only I don't care about it—and it is only tit for tat—for Lord Deville and I have been as sweet as possible on one another all the time."

Deville was excessively annoyed at this observation, but it was one of his maxims that the truth deceives best, at times. On a moment's reflection, he was not so vexed as he might otherwise have been, and he replied with playful vivacity, "Oh, yes, we have been indemnifying ourselves—but we are excessively jealous, nevertheless."

"You will be more so, then, for I am determined—my new horse is such a beautiful, high-spirited creature—I am determined to call it 'Sparkleton,'" said Lord Fitzhauton, eagerly, and without much noticing this skirmish. "And I declare, Mrs. Sparkleton, I do declare, I think your heads resemble, they are both so finely cut, and there is such fire and breeding in your eyes and nostrils!"

"There is a compliment!—to be com-

pared to a horse! Let us be off," replied Mrs. Sparkleton; but her fine eyes lighted up with pleasure as if she felt it as one. "Heaven be praised, however, our *manes* don't resemble; my namesake's is of a light grey, I think?"

"He wants to coax you from me, but he shan't!" said the alderman, hugging Mrs. Sparkleton closer to him.

"But first of all, as I have you all together—I mean to send you notes, in course—but that you mayn't engage yourselves anywhere else, I'll just mention that I have been obliged to shift our grand dinner to Sunday," said Mrs. Gullibull; adding, with mysterious solemnity,—"The GREAT MAN can't come on Saturday, as he promised; there's a rail to be hocus-pocused into paying, somewhere down in the country, that he quite forgot, and he can't be back again till Sunday forenoon."

Fitzhauton looked beseechingly at Mrs. Sparkleton; but her answer was already on her lips. "You may make sure of me, Mrs.

Gullibull; I would not miss meeting with the money magician on any account. The only drawback will be, that most likely Miss Scurmucheon will not come. I believe she has some particular opinions about the observance of the sabbath, and always has a cold dinner herself on that day."

"Then she can do the other thing, if she is such a Methodist, and I shall save both my meat and my manners," replied Mrs. Gullibull. "And pray, my lord, don't *you* disappoint us."

"I have no counter-engagement, I believe," replied Lord Deville. "But I have left my memoranda on my dressing table. I shall be sure to send word."

"Ha, ha, ha! How can you have a *counter*-engagement? You don't keep a shop, do you, my lord?" jocosely and wittily observed the alderman.

"Well, don'tee disappoint us; and as it is going to be a very large party——" began Mrs. Gullibull—

"Oh! you *shall* come, Lord Deville!

you shall *not* disappoint me, mind!" said Lady Fitzhauton, whose secret irritation and utter want of mastery over her temper impelled her to say and do the most foolish things. "We will take no denial; at least, *I* won't, whatever engagement you have."

"None could possibly be pleasanter to me," replied his lordship.

"I see I may book a place for you; but what I was going to say when I was interrupted by her ladyship," resumed Mrs. Gullibull, "was, that as our party is so large, it don't matter about one or two, more or less, and I shall be very much pleased to see this young gentleman at dinner, too, —Mr. Twiggletit, I believe your name is, sir?"

"Don't cheat the immortal syllables of their due—it is Twittlewit," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "But let us go. My carnations are on the way out, and I really am tired."

The alderman took the hint, and moved off with his brilliant companion, while young

Gullibull, assuming the place of a favoured admirer, pushed on through the crowd after them on the other side. Deville and Lady Fitzhauton followed, while her husband was seized and appropriated by his mother-in-law—an unwilling victim. Mrs. Gullibull seemed not to anticipate the possibility of a refusal to her invitation from Twittlewit, for she did not even wait for an acceptance. And but that the bard inwardly imputed his sudden progress from an introduction to a dinner, to the dazzling effect of his literary renown, he might have been offended with its abrupt singularity. As it was, he raised his hat to the back of Mrs. Gullibull's bonnet, and seemed by his silence to give consent. Every one had forgotten Charity Green, and she followed in the wake of her bustling aunt—alone.

Charity was retired and calm by nature and habit, but she was not insensible. No deeper and more painful feelings of neglect, loneliness, and slighted affection could visit a heart not formed indeed for violent or

heroic passions, but capable of sentiments more fixed and enduring than any. With all her poverty she was proud; but the mortification of the visible slight she endured was as nothing compared with her own self-contempt in finding how powerfully it affected her to remember by whom it was inflicted. Charity would have been more content with her destiny, at least resigned to it, if she could have preserved a feeling of respect for the author of her misery. But to feel that she had loved, and did still love, a man whom even the natural blindness of the passion could not disguise from her to be so unworthy, troubled her. Had she even thought that Midas's inconstancy; long suspected, of late more and more cogently confirmed; was the result of a superior passion for the beauty and brilliant qualities of her splendid rival, Charity would almost have forgiven him. But she knew that Mrs. Sparkleton's wealth was his chief lure; her consequence in society, her high birth: that no generous

madness inflamed him. She had not even the consolation left her, not to despise him.

The prospect of a lonely, uncared-for existence had of late grown gradually familiarized to the contemplations of Charity Green. But it was now thrust rather abruptly and overpoweringly upon her, as she followed, the last and utterly unnoticed one of so numerous and gay a party. The delicacy and fixedness of her character rendered any idea of ever uniting herself with any man, but him who had won her virgin affections, more unpalatable than utter loneliness to the visions of the post-office clerk's orphan. Therefore, all her future existence must needs be lonely, even if any other man should ever again take notice of her. A matter which poor Charity, in the humility of her self-depreciation, thought as impossible as it would be vexatious and uncalled-for.

Silent and unobservant as she seemed to the many who do not observe, Charity was, nevertheless, possessed of considerable penetration, and frequently indulged in mental

analyses of conduct and character, which led her to conclusions undreamed by the objects of her scrutiny. It is probable, that she alone of all these processioning groups of fours, had a painful suspicion, at times amounting to conviction, of the real motives and purposes at work.

Foremost, she perceived alderman Gullibull and Mrs. Sparkleton engaged in evidently earnest and matter-of-business conversation, in which they both took so eager an interest, that no notice whatever was taken of the would-be attendant son. Whether in disdain of this neglect, or for some purpose of his own, Midas had sunk into the rear, but kept up so closely behind that he might very profitably overhear a good deal of the conversation. Charity's heart misgave her, that he was meanly endeavouring to overhear the particulars of the dialogue, too probably on the score of its connexion with his own views on the purse, as well as person, of the rich widow of Colonel Sparkleton. Behind them fol-

lowed Lady Fitzhauton and Lord Deville; the former assiduously performing what she considered to be a retaliating flirtation with the latter, intended to provoke her husband's jealousy and spleen. Charity felt that it would only awaken his contempt and aversion, while she was by no means certain that he had not some reasonable ground, besides his wife's folly and imprudence, to distrust the intentions of Deville.

Charity was a lady; at least in feeling and mind, and she was vexed to the heart continually with the vulgarity of her aunt's pretensions and demeanour. She was grateful to her for former kindness, and really loved all the loveable points of her character. But it pained her almost as much as it annoyed Lord Fitzhauton, to mark her pompous parade and display of herself and of her noble son-in-law, as they passed through the grounds. Perhaps it was a relief to the whole party—for it released them all from a species of acting which had become tedious to several of the performers—when they suddenly reached the gates of the gardens. Mrs. Sparkleton declared, and

very truly, that she had been so absorbed in the conversation she had quite forgotten her carnations, and it was unanimously agreed not to return on their account.

And no wonder—Alderman Gullibull was a complete enthusiast on the topic in which Mrs. Sparkleton had engaged him in conversation. The ancient voyagers in quest of El Dorado, the modern pilgrims of California, never had a more earnest faith and zeal in their golden visions than alderman Gullibull in his Railway speculations. In fact, he would not suffer himself for a moment to doubt the success of schemes in which he had embarked so large a venture—a far larger one than the worst suspicions of Midas himself suggested. He had a special liking for Mrs. Sparkleton, and was very willing that she should put her sickle into the golden harvest. He was flattered with her implicit trust in his judgment: she wanted shares in the lines in which he was interested, and only in those. He imagined himself deeply in the confidence of the great bubble-blower of the hour—

and it happened that he himself was in immediate want of a large sum of money to pay up his calls on the numerous shares of which he was possessed. Alderman Gullibull was not in that most secret and recondite part of the great mystery, which enabled purchasers to buy without paying, and receive large interest for sums of money which they ought to have paid it on. He was, therefore, induced, without much difficulty, to promise procuring Mrs. Sparkleton an assignment of shares, which would probably render a renewed application to her friend, Mrs. Skinflintz, an event not very distantly possible.

Midas overheard, at least, so much of this conversation, as quickened his conviction of the necessity of pushing on his projects to some decision. He volunteered, with a zeal which Mrs. Sparkleton had some difficulty in repulsing, to see her safely home, as he said, in her carriage. But she declared she was in no apprehension of any danger, accepted Lord Fitzhauton's hand to the vehicle, and sate in it talking in an under tone with him on the steps, till

Deville came up to beg a seat in it. He had declined Lady Fitzhauton's strenuous request, that he would take one beside her in her carriage, "since Lord Fitzhauton was evidently not going home with *her*," and reminded his noble friend that he was keeping her ladyship waiting.

Husband and wife accordingly "went home" in moody silence together, while Lord Deville and Mrs. Sparkleton—the latter in a charming flow of spirits—diverted one another by turning into ridicule almost all they had seen or heard during the day. Mrs. Gullibull only recollected her niece when she saw her dejectedly following into their vehicle. "Law, Charity, what a dummy you are! I had really almost forgotten you were not at home over your tambour work," was the apology she thought it necessary to make on the occasion.

END OF VOL. I.

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